Classic Gamer Magazine

Spring 2000 Issue #3 www.classicgamer.com

Lost Arcade Classic
Blue Shark

History of
Spider-Man Videogames

New Atari Previews!
Galaga
Pac-Man
Frogger 2
and Breakout

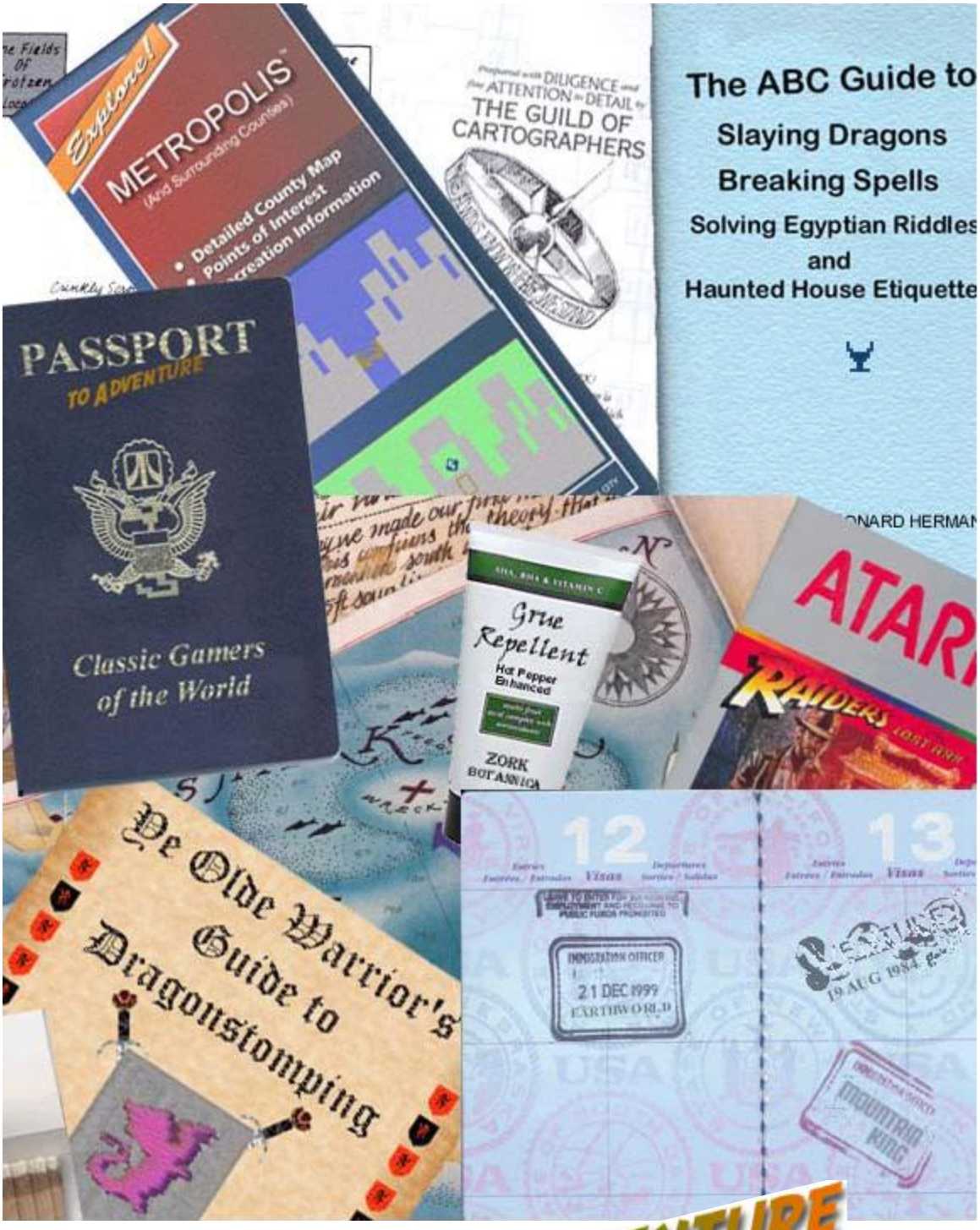
Our Favorite Adventure Games Reviewed

Michael Thomasson

"It's designed to be a 'wow' cart."

-- Howard Warshaw, on explaining Raiders of the Lost Ark for the Atari 2600, 1982, Inside Atari magazine

Classic Gamer Magazine



PASSPORT TO ADVENTURE

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"Adventure" Review

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Everything's "Super" with Chris Lion

Reset

by
Chris Cavanaugh

Without a doubt, Atari's "Adventure" was always my favorite videogame. Admittedly, graphics-wise, it was lacking, but as far as inspiring one's imagination, it was second to none. In these most buxom days of Lara Croft, it probably looks a little silly to move a flat chested block around the screen, slaying Mallard-esque dragons, in search of a flashing Chalice. But I'm the first to admit the Red Dragon still puts the fear of God into me when he appears.

Second to playing "Adventure," "Superman" still gets quite a bit of airtime on my television. Not only do I get to capture criminals, avoid Kryptonite and build bridges, but I get to kiss a virtual Lois Lane as well!.

I'm also partial to Activision's "H.E.R.O." and ColecoVision's "Venture." Where else are we going to get the opportunity to rescue trapped mineworkers and battle Hall Monsters while searching for treasure?

It's when we couple enduring gameplay with a bit of our own imaginations, can we bestow the true "Classic" title on these games.

We thought it would be fun to re-visit the classic games of adventure; the ones that kept us holed up for hours on weekends and after school. Homework could always wait when criminals were busy blowing up bridges, and chalices remained locked up in Black Castles.

Craig Pell was on hand and generously granted us interviews in regards to his update of "Adventure", called "Indenture." Patrick Wong shows us the good, bad and ugly of the "Spider-Man" series of games.

We also welcome two talented writers to our staff, Earl Green and Tim Snider. Earl reveals all in his article, "Honey, I Slept With Ms. Pac-Man," and Tim tells about his brush with programming greatness.

We've also learned of a potential long, lost Easter Egg hidden deep within "Raiders of the Lost Ark" and have created the contest, "Raiders of the Lost 'J,'" around it.

The new Atari has been busy creating exciting updates of Galaga, Pac-Man, Breakout, and Frogger. We have posted a four page gallery of screenshots for your enjoyment and analysis.

As always, we hope you enjoy this latest issue. Don't forget we're here to serve you. Feel free to drop us a line to let us know how we're doing or what you'd like to see. 'Til then, see ya next issue!

-Cav

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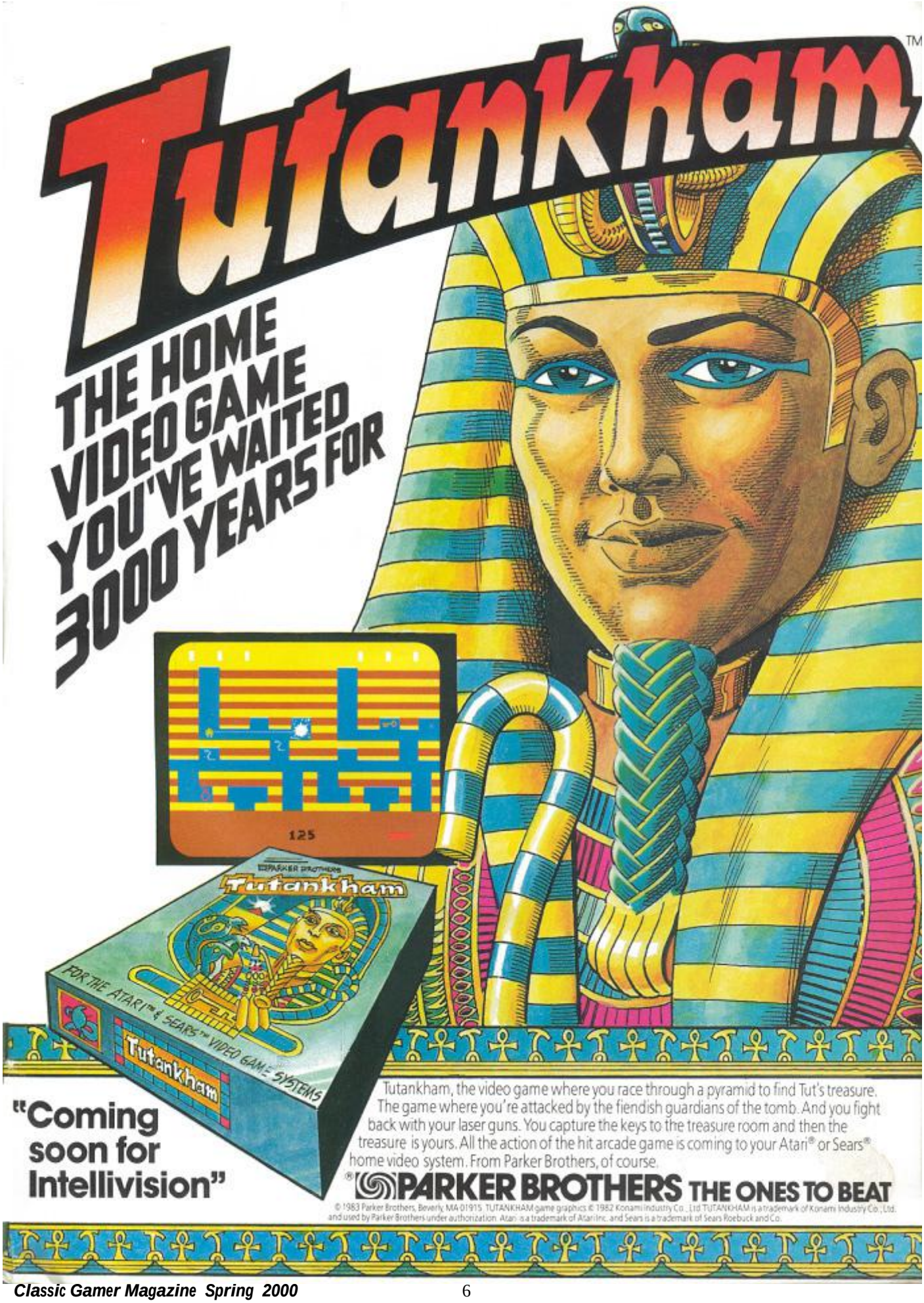
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PARKER BROTHERS THE ONES TO BEAT
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CLASSIC GAMER NEWSWIRE

Help Fight Diabetes!
Buy Battlesphere for the Jaguar!

Battlesphere for the Atari Jaguar Shipping Soon

The long awaited and much anticipated Jaguar game, Battlesphere, will soon be shipping, according to its publisher, Scatologic, Inc. The game will feature numerous gameplay variations including multi-player deathmatch for up 32 players.

The game takes place 800 years in the future, when intergalactic border disputes are resolved in a confined area of space entitled "Battlesphere." The triumphant race will be permitted to colonize freely and each of the remaining races will be confined to its original, dying home world.

The limited edition cartridge will retail for $74.99, which is a bargain when you consider that a special autographed first copy was auctioned on eBay for $1,575! All profits made on Battlesphere will be donated to diabetes research. For ordering information, go to:

http://www.best.com/~sebab/

Atari Arcade Hits 2 in Stores Soon

How could Atari outdo their impressive "Atari Arcade Hits 1" package? With "Atari Arcade Hits 2," of course.

This impressive second volume of games for the PC will include such arcade favorites as Asteroids Deluxe, Gravitar, Crystal Castles, Millipede, Warlords, and Battlezone. All games are faithful reproductions of their classic arcade counterparts.

Like its predecessor, Volume 2 will contain graphically enhanced versions of the games, desktop themes to spruce up your computer, and Atari Archives which delves into each game's history.

Atari Arcade Hits Volume 2 is expected to retail for $19.99. For more information, visit Atari's website at:

http://www.atari.com

CLASSIC GAMER NEWSWIRE cont. . .

Classic Gaming Expo 2000 Gearing Up For Third Annual Meeting

Following the unprecedented success of the previous two Classic Gaming Expos, show organizers have decided to "do it again" for 2000.

CGE2k will be held the weekend of July 29-30 at the Plaza Hotel in downtown Las Vegas, Nevada.

Attendees will be able to rub elbows with their favorite classic gaming creators, as well as other classic game collectors. The show will also feature many classic arcade games set on free play, a variety of vendors selling common and rare games for consoles and computers, and the chance to listen to many of the alumni of classic videogames' rich history.

Confirmed guests include: Ralph Baer ("The Father of Videogames"), Steve Cartwright (designer of Megamania), Bob Polaro (programmer of the VCS' Defender), and Electronic Games Magazine founders, Arnie Katz, Bill Kunkel, and Joyce Worley.

Last year's convention was a blast; we highly recommend all our readers attend.

For details on how to register and to stay updated on all CGE2k events, go to:

http://www.cgexpo.com

Classic Gamer Magazine Hosts Online "Atari 2600 Cartridge Showdown"

Would you like a say in which Atari 2600 cartridge is crowned the greatest of all time? Does Enduro drive laps around Pole Position? Can Joust knock off Defender? Will Centipede trample Frogger? The decision is yours in the Atari 2600 Cartridge Showdown, hosted online by Classic Gamer Magazine. Throughout the coming weeks, guests are invited to visit **www.classicgamer.com** to vote for their favorites. Game contenders will be rotated every few days, so visit early and vote often!

Winners from each round will proceed to further rounds in an attempt to defend their titles. The battle will eventually be won when the final two games go head-to-head and a "Greatest Atari 2600 Cartridge" winner will be crowned.

Go to:

www.classicgamer.com

The Second Annual Funspot & Twin Galaxies International Classic Video & Pinball Tournament

FUNSPOT

Think you have what it takes to be the best? Your chance to prove it is June 1-4, 2000 when a High-Score Contest on nearly 125 classic video game & pinball titles from the early 80's will be held at "Funspot" in Weirs Beach, New Hampshire.

The top 10 scores on each game will see their names in next year's edition of Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records.

For more details on how to register, go to:

http://www.funspotnh.com
&
http://www.twingalaxies.com

Atari Gets First Class Treatment

Who says your vote can't make a difference? In honor of the 1980's, the United States Postal Service let the people decide which images they would like to see emblazoned on a postage stamp.

The people spoke and videogames won! The stamp (pictured above) portrays two kids playing Defender on their Atari VCS.

Other winners included the movie "E.T.," The San Francisco Forty Niners, and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Good Grief!

Charles Schulz, Rest in Peace 1922-2000

CLASSIC GAMER NEWSWIRE cont. . .

Classic Prototype News

Two New Atari 2600 Games Discovered

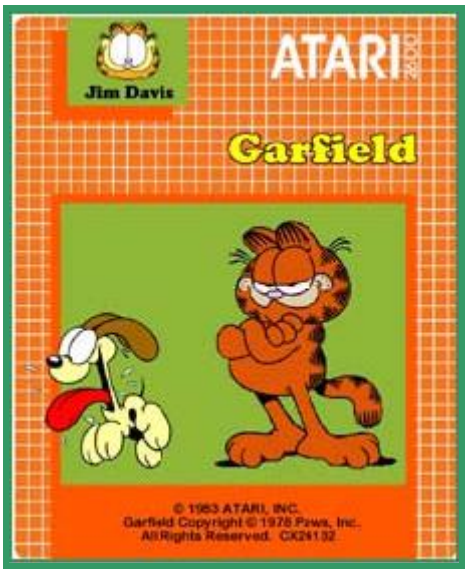
Two new Atari 2600 prototypes, Sky Patrol and Garfield, were discovered at last year's Classic Gaming Expo.

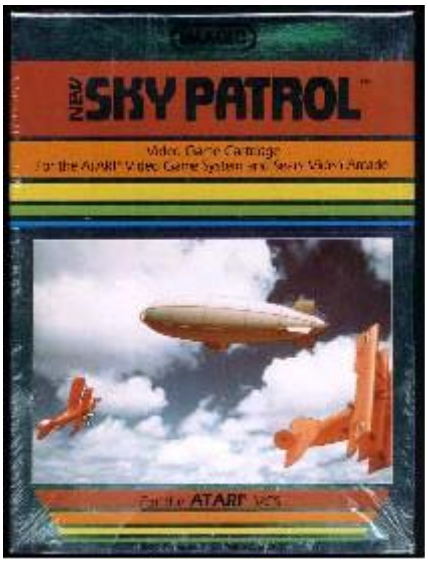
The Garfield game, once the subject of an elaborate April Fool's joke, was believed to be just vaporware until it turned up at the Expo. Programmed by Steve Woita of "Taz" and "Quadrun" fame, the object of the game is to rescue what would appear to be Garfield's teddy bear while gulping hamburgers, dodging flowerpots, and avoiding the big-tongued Odie.

Imagic's Sky Patrol has you pilot a WWI Zeppelin through unfriendly skies in search of your enemy.

Both titles can be freely downloaded for emulator play at:

http://www.cgexpo.com





Online Classic Videogame Radio Station, WGDG, Now Begins its Programming Day

Will videogames kill the radio star? Michael Thomasson of Good Deal Games sure hopes not.

Recently, Good Deal Games launched a round-the-clock Internet broadcast featuring videogame related songs and clips.

Currently, the play list contains videogame music from all periods within the industry's history, but WGDG plans to include more classic gaming music into the mix. The current problem is that many classic games simply lacked background music due to the technical limitations of the time.

So, what exactly are some of the titles you can hear by tuning in? Michael Thomasson explained, "Stephanie Wukovitz graciously contributed original music from the newly released Jaguar game, BattleSphere. Currently playing is the Main Theme of BattleSphere, and Thunderbird's Theme. Buckner & Garcia have given WGDG permission to broadcast all of their classic gaming hit songs, including Pac-Man Fever and Froggy's Lament!" In addition to music, WGDG Radio plays laserdisc coin-op openings such as "Dragon's Lair."

WGDG Radio is also accepting song donations via MP3 format. Many items that WGDG plays are adaptations of the originals or remixes created by listeners and hobbyists.

http://www.gooddealgames.com

NINTENDO 64 RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR CLASSIC RELATED GAMES

May 2000
Excitebike 64

Second Quarter 2000
Glover 2

Summer 2000
Spider-Man

TBA
Super Mario RPG 2
Ecco the Dolphin

SONY PLAYSTATION RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR CLASSIC RELATED GAMES

April 2000
Gauntlet Legends
Mortal Kombat: Special Forces

June 2000
Spider-Man

Release Schedule

GAME BOY RELEASE SCHEDULE CLASSIC RELATED GAMES

April 2000
1942
Toobin'

Second Quarter 2000
Obelix

June 2000
Donkey Kong: Dinky Kong & Dixie

TBA
Frogger2
Galaga
Galaxian
Gauntlet
Q*Bert

DREAMCAST RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR CLASSIC RELATED GAMES

Second Quarter 2000

Gauntlet Legends

TBA
Ecco the Dolphin

Atari Alphas

As a result of its many licensing deals, Hasbro Interactive's Atari division recently announced three upcoming games for the PC and Sony PlayStation: Frogger II (PC & PSX), Galaga (PSX), and Pac-Man (PC).

Galaga Returns!

Remember looking at the artwork on old videogame boxes thinking, "Wouldn't it be great if the game actually looked like this?" Well, it seems that day is finally here.

Atari has licensed the hit title "Galaga" from Namco in hopes of bringing back the thrill of this exciting shooter. Judging from the above screenshot, we won't be disappointed.

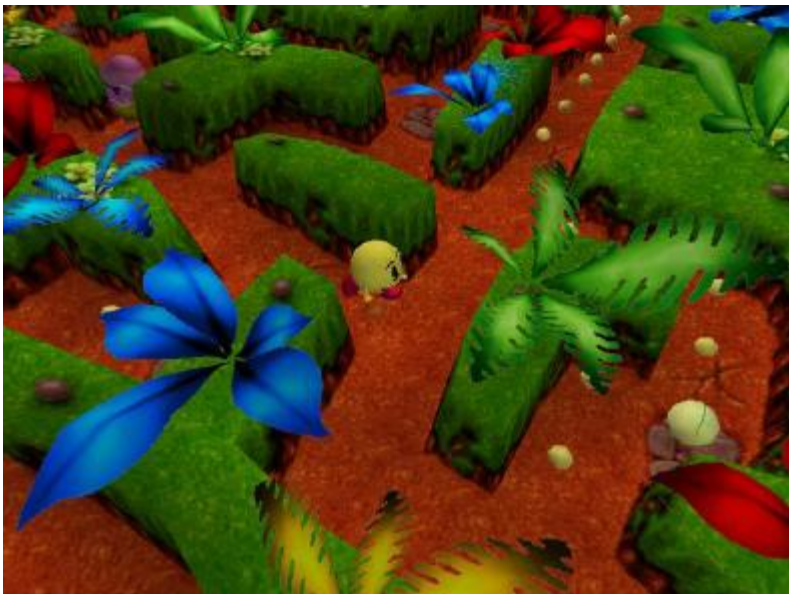
So far the new Atari has done an admirable job in updating the classics and hopefully Galaga will be no exception.

Galaga

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Developer: Hasbro Interactive
Release Date: Fall 2000

PC PlayStation

Atari Alphas



Atari has licensed our favorite maze-running masticator from Namco and is scheduled to release his new game in the Fall of 2000.

Pac's all new quest will have him journey through time to retrieve 5 magical power pills. The game promises 26 levels, spanning 5 time periods.

We also have it on good word that it'll be better than the Atari 2600 version of Pac-Man. Is that even possible??

Pac-Man

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Developer: Hasbro Interactive
Release Date: Fall 2000

PC

Atari Alphas

Hey Frog, you lookin' at me?

What will hopefully be a sequel better than its predecessor, Frogger II - Swampy's Revenge will float onto your PC and PlayStation this Fall.

We hope Atari has managed to correct the often frustrating controls and camera angles that diminished the enjoyment of their original remake. Judging from their recent offerings such as Q*Bert and Pong, we believe they may have gotten the swing of things.

No word if George Costanza from Seinfeld will make a guest appearance in the game.

Frogger Takes a Long Hop Off a Short Pier

Extraterrestrial Frogs?

Frogger 2:

Swampy's Revenge

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Developer: Interactive Studios
Release Date: Fall 2000

PC PlayStation

ATARI ALPHAS

Atari has also dipped into its classic licenses to bring us "Breakout-The Great Escape."

Our favorite paddle, "Pong", is back as he battles his way to rescue his girlfriend, "Ping," from the vile clutches of the evil "Pung."

Now, say that five times fast.

Breakout:

The Great Escape

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive
Developer: Supersonic Software
Release Date: September 2000

PC PlayStation

New Game Spotlight

"Towards a Better Pac-Man"

Last issue we mentioned a great new hack of Pac-Man for the Atari 2600 and wanted to give you more info on this wonderful game.

If you were disappointed with the Atari 2600 version of Pac-Man from the early 80's, you'll definitely want to get your hands on "Pac26." Created by Rob Kudla, Pac26 is actually a hack of Ms. Pac-Man for the Atari 2600. The result is a better looking, sounding, and playing translation of the coin-op classic.

Best of all, it's free to download for your Atari 2600 emulator!

Go to http://www.kudla.org/raindog/games

Be sure to also check out Rob's other projects, including an Atari 2600 Space Invaders hack, as well as labels he created for Pac26.

Rob Kudla Does "Pac-Man" Right!

And the winner of the "Too Much Free Time Award" is...

The AtaRio Project

In an attempt to put off studying for midterms, Eric Jones decided to put his time to good use in creating the "The AtaRio Project."

The concept is quite simple (sort of). Eric used his computer to convert Atari Roms to .wav files, then he converted the .wav files to MP3 files. After a quick trip to Radio Shack and a few tweaks here and there to his Starpath Supercharger, Eric can now upload up to 60 games into his Atari 2600 utilizing his Diamond Rio MP3 player. Pretty clever! Check out his instructions at: http://scv.bu.edu/~ejones/toys/atario/

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lost Arcade Classic

BLUE SHARK

by Kyle Snyder

There's something that I've been in the dark about for over 20 years now: An obscure, dinky little toy that I was fascinated with but never actually got to see. At least I think it was a toy. Honestly, I don't know what the hell it was. Its name? The "Smoking Pet."

When my father and I would ride up to the local Dart Drug store for Anacin, WD-40, or a good Christmas tree (Dart Drug was VERY diversified in its product selection), I would inevitably find my way to a little vending machine with goofy "cereal box prize" items for sale. One such item was the "smoking pet." I vaguely recall a crude cartoon showing a mutant dog-type thing with a cigarette in its mouth. Quite disturbing, if you ask me. Perhaps somebody complained, for on one trip to Dart Drug in the summer of 1979, the smoking pet and his/her/its machine of bizarre junk was gone. It had been replaced with a large wooden cabinet, decorated with fierce sharks glaring at me. Hmmmm... it has a cool gun on it. Oh, neat! There are sharks and other sea creatures swimming around, and I guess you shoot at them with the gun... "Daddy, can I have a quarter?"

That, my friends, is how I became acquainted with Midway's Blue Shark.

Blue Shark would become the precursor to later hit games such as Crossbow, Operation Wolf, and to an extent, even Area 51. They all operate on the same principal: shoot a mock gun at the monitor to hit targets for points. While these later games added power ups, interactive backgrounds, and plot, Blue Shark existed purely as an underwater shooting gallery.

Midway produced a very eye-catching game here. The game play was displayed on a standard black and white raster monitor, which was located near the base of the cabinet. The monitor faced upwards, at a two-way mirror angled toward the player. Behind the mirror was an elaborately painted underwater scene complete with rocks, sea plants, and schools of fish, all illuminated using hidden lights in the top of the cabinet. The end result was that the player saw the REFLECTION of the video sea creatures "swimming" around underwater. A nifty environmental effect, indeed.

Instead of a joystick and a fire button, an electronic "dart gun" was mounted on the control panel as a means of firing at the various denizens of the deep. The object of the game was to rack up a high score by shooting as many swordfish, sharks (Blues, perhaps?), and octopi in the allotted time of 99 seconds per quarter spent.

Swordfish were the easiest targets, as they just kind of meandered, lazily swimming slowly and low to the ground. Because your harpoons emerged from the bottom of the screen and traveled north towards the target, the lower a creature appeared on the screen, the quicker he could be speared. Sometimes a swordfish would foil your plans and reverse direction just as you had him in your sights. But no matter. Unless the fish managed to swim off the side of the screen, you'd have another clear shot shortly, and an easy 200 points.

The sharks were trickier. They were slightly faster than the swords when swimming low, but then they'd dart upwards along the extreme left or right, and speed across the top of the screen in an arc-like pattern.

The game awarded you a nice 500 points for scoring such a difficult shot, versus 300 for low swimming blues. However, the increased speed, distance from your gun, and unpredictable movement made the shark a very challenging target to nail dead on.

The octopi were a mixed bag. They'd appear stationary in one spot for two seconds, then shake their tentacles and disappear, often reappearing a few seconds later on the other side of the screen. Occasionally, one would happen into your targeted area, and you'd get a quick 400 points. Usually, however, you'd fire, and he'd "wink out" before your harpoon met its mark.

After several seconds, the machine would send out a friendly deep-sea diver. I'm not quite sure of his motives, as he was apparently oblivious to the underwater carnage going on around him. Perhaps he was attracted to the sunken treasure that was part of the backdrop. Whatever his story, Midway wanted you to be nice to your fellow man, as shooting him would subtract 500 points from your score. (Funny that the shark didn't attack him... maybe that was going to be in Blue Shark II!) So, for a quarter, you'd get 99 seconds to harpoon as much underwater life as possible, while resisting the urge to shoot the divers. Sounds like a pretty good deal; sign me up.

And, if anybody out there knows what those dang "smoking pets" were, please let me know. I promise not to tell the authorities.

CGM

Blue Shark Flyer Photo Courtesy of www.basementarcade.com

Whatever Happened to "Skill?"

By Terrell Gibbs

(ed note...this article reprinted from rec.games. video.sega by permission of author)

The release of Crazy Taxi has highlighted a split among game players. While most people love the game, there are clearly a few who just "don't get it." Typical of the complaints is the remark that "Anybody who thinks [Crazy Taxi] has replay value must also feel that Asteroids was one of the all time re-play value games." While this is an unintentionally hilarious statement (given that that the perennial popularity of Asteroids makes it one of the *most* re-playable games of all time), it is most likely literally true. That is, the people who find great replay value in Asteroids are probably the most enthusiastic fans of Crazy Taxi.

To understand this, it is useful to recognize that there has been a paradigm shift in the way people play games, and video games in particular. Traditionally, the games people play have been "skill driven." That is, the primary goal of the player is to maximize his score, either in absolute terms or relative to a competitor. This is true of just about all sports, card games, and board games, all of which have simple, repetitive play mechanics. Early video games followed the same traditional pattern, perhaps increasing in speed or with slight modifications in layout, but always presenting the player with essentially the same tasks and problems.

But then Nintendo, with Donkey Kong, introduced a dramatic new twist: after completing the first "board," the player was presented with a completely different set of platforms to negotiate, with a new set of tasks to accomplish. Soon, other games picked up on the same theme. The original Pac-Man game had only one maze, but its sequel, Ms. Pac-Man, had a series of mazes, with only the highly skilled players getting to see the last. Nintendo's Mario Land console games introduced exploration and discovery into game play. More and more, the goal of the play was to see what was next, and ultimately, to exhaust the game; to get to the "end."

Of course, skill-driven videogames had an "end" of sorts; a really skilled player could overflow the score counter and "wrap" the game. This was generally an unintentional consequence of the developer failing to realize just how good players could get at the game, and failing to provide enough bits in the score counter.

Originally, a game with great replay value was one that rewarded persistent play with a steady increase in the player's skill. The most popular games were "deep," with many possible strategies. Most importantly, the very act of playing the game had to be enjoyable. Progression of difficulty had to be carefully tuned; players lost interest if they quickly "hit a wall" (reached a level of skill that they were unable to progress beyond) or, conversely, if they became so skilled that the game no longer presented a challenge. To develop a game with multiple levels of strategy to reward the beginning, intermediate, and advanced player alike was very hard. We remember the great classic games, but for each that succeeded, there were many that failed. On the other hand, a successful skill-driven game can provide replay value that few modern games can

match, with devoted players returning to the same games year after year.

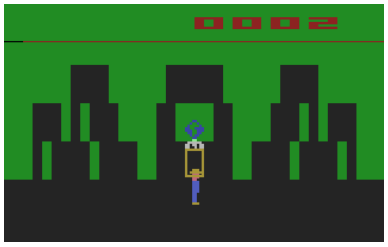
Today, the vast majority of video-games are largely "novelty-driven." Indeed, many have dispensed with scores altogether. The "hook" that keeps the player returning is not the desire to improve his skills, but rather the desire to be rewarded with something new. And ultimately, when he finally exhausts everything that the game has to offer, he expects an "extra-special" reward. This has led to a shift in the meaning of "replay value." Today, a game that is acclaimed for its "replay value" is simply one that has a lot of stuff to see, or multiple endings. The gameplay itself no longer has to be all that enjoyable if the novelty payoff is great enough. Often, games merely require persistence, not great skill, to "beat," and some players even feel cheated if they are unable to beat the game in relatively short order. One consequence is the rising interest in "cheats," which enable the player to get the "reward" (see the whole game) without doing the "work" of mastering the gameplay.

I think one thing that has hurt Sega is that they have never fully accepted this paradigm shift. Sega still puts great effort into making the gameplay inherently enjoyable, often at the price of including less "stuff" to reward the novelty-driven player. The classic criticism of Sega's arcade games is that they are too short, because Sega expects players to play each level over and over until they attain true proficiency. It is telling that so many Sega games, including Crazy Taxi, provide the player with some kind of a performance rating, and achieving a high grade typically requires extensive practice. Unfortunately, I think that fewer and fewer players appreciate this classic style of gameplay. However, I find the popularity of Crazy Taxi encouraging. Here is a game that supports what is essentially classic, skill-driven play, while providing enough novelty, in the sense of a large city, multiple destinations, and multiple routes, to satisfy at least some (although clearly not all) novelty-driven players.

CGM

Superman (Atari 2600)

While turning on the power, hold down the button on the joystick for about 2 seconds. When you release the button, Superman will not transform into Clark Kent, and the bridge will not explode (you will, however, see its three pieces in the subway). Quickly capture Lex Luthor and his gang and proceed directly to the Daily Planet to finish the game. This Easter Egg will only appear on the early cartridges



Completed in 2 Seconds Flat!

Second Easter Egg:

Start the game and move Clark Kent to the center of the screen to where the Daily Planet entrance would be. Hold down the "Select" button on the console and wait until the Daily Planet appears. When it appears and you have Clark aligned correctly, release the "Select" switch and move into the door to win the game. It doesn't make for a very exciting game, but the novelty is still there.

Raiders of the Lost Ark

Take the Chai and a parachute to the flying saucer mesa. Walk off the mesa and immediately drop the Chai when Indy begins his descent. Yar, from *Yars' Revenge*, will appear.

Second Easter Egg

After finding the Yar, continue the game as usual and obtain a high score. Howard Scott Warshaw's initials, "HSW2," will appear in the inventory once the game has been completed.

Space Invaders

Hold down the "Reset" button while turning your Atari 2600 on. In doing so, your cannon will fire 2 shots instead of one. *Submitted by G.P. Fornasiero and Clarence Sherrell*

Double Your Fun

Dragonstomper

While the image of the Handaxe is showing, execute the "Use Shield" command. The initials of programmer, Steven H. Landrum, will appear..

CGM

Have an Easter Egg or cheat code you want to share? Send it on in and we'll print it here.

E-mail it to:
cav@classicgamer.com

Craig Pell. Indenture's Servant

By Kyle Snyder

Craig Pell, aside from being an avid classic gamer and collector, is also known for programming an amazing port of the Atari 2600 cartridge, Adventure, in assembly, entitled "Indenture." In his words, Indenture will work on: "any PC from the lowliest 8088 to a Pentium III." I recently spoke with Craig regarding Indenture.

CGM: Why Adventure in particular? Why not begin with something simpler, such as Combat?

CP: Adventure was the game I wanted more of. Combat is fun, but you don't play it and think "Oh Man! If only there were FIVE planes at a time!" When I played Adventure, there were specific points where I was hoping for more. For example, using the dot at the line barrier near the white castle to see if there's anything beyond it.

CGM: I've heard that you created additional levels than the Atari designed three. How are these levels different from the original three?

CP: Well, it's just one level, in the sense that game two and game three are one level. Game two and game three contain 31 rooms. Game 4 and game 5, which I added, contain 300-plus rooms, but the original 31 rooms are present in exactly the same configuration. There are some additional objects too. One is an object which lets you temporarily neutralize the bat.

CGM: How long did Indenture take to program?

CP: Two or three years, off and on.

CGM: Why did you name it Indenture, rather than using its original title?

CP: Originally it was going to be called Adventure. In fact, I have conditional directives so that I could recompile it with the title screen saying Adventure instead of Indenture. The reason for the name change has to do with the roundabout treatment I got from Atari Corp. After over a year of negotiation with them, I was rapidly losing patience. Indenture seemed appropriately sarcastic.

CGM: Have you heard anything from Adventure programmer, Warren Robinett, concerning Indenture?

CP: Not directly. I heard he had seen the game and found the extra rooms rather tedious. I must admit, I added a tremendous amount of them, which changed the feel of the game on a basic level.

CGM: What is your favorite classic system to collect games for?

CP: Definitely the Atari 2600. Probably because I had one back in "the day."

CGM: How about to program for?

CP: I've never programmed any classic system, except for the Tandy Color Computer. I know 6502 assembly, and I've given thought to programming the 2600 several times, but I never had the hardware to do it. And now that there are emulators available, and I don't need special hardware, I find that I don't have the time.

CGM: And to play?

CP: I'm not sure I have a favorite. The 2600 obviously has a bunch of great games, but Colecovision and Intellivision games tend to have more depth.

CGM: What is your background in programming, and had you programmed any other games before Indenture?

CP: It goes all the way back to the first time I used an Apple in third grade. It was around sixth grade when I made games - in Basic, of course - and it wasn't long before I discovered Basic wasn't fast enough to do anything decent. So I learned assembly. In 1990 I programmed Tetris in C; not because it was a challenge, but it was a good way to teach myself C.

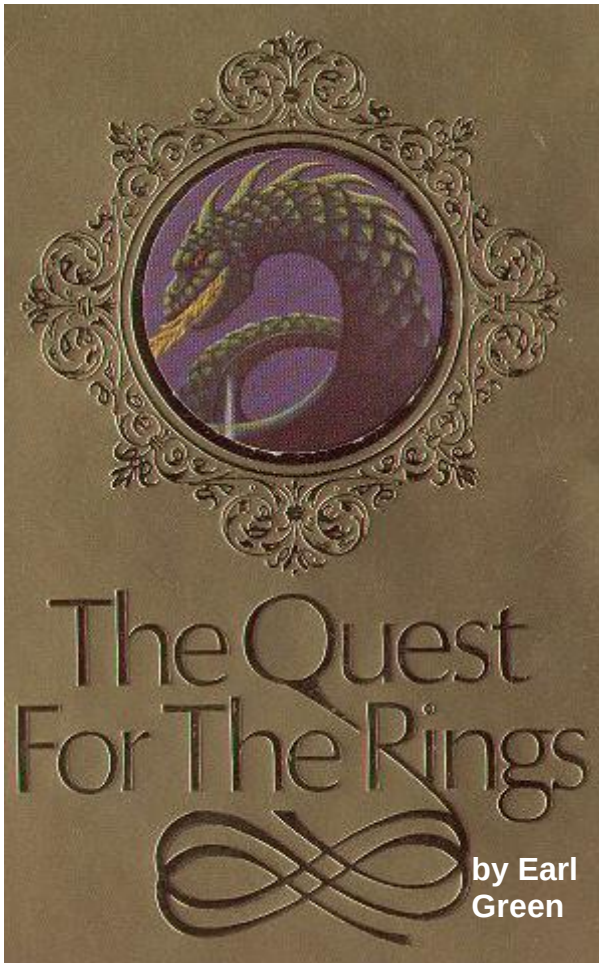
I've done a few others: in junior high I wrote a vaguely Space Invaders-ish game for the Tandy CoCo in Basic, which I actually sold to a few students who really liked it. I fooled around with a Robotron-like game in high school and later, a somewhat Scramble-like game. The Scramble-like game turned out to be too complex, but a few years later, I started all over again in assembly, and got it about 80% finished. While I was working on that, a guy named Tim Sweeney, in the computer lab at the University of Maryland, happened to notice it on the screen. He was there working on a game too; it was called Jill of the Jungle. Needless to say, we got to talking, and it looked like I was going to be a part of the then fledgling Epic Megagames. We turned out to have some creative differences, and I decided to go my own way.

CGM: Are you working on any other games now?

CP: No, but I do have a few that I would like to do, if I ever have the time. Being out of college and having a job makes it difficult.

Indenture can be downloaded at: http://softwarezone.com/noframes/game65.html

Platform: Magnavox Odyssey 2
Stock number: AC 9429
Released: 1981

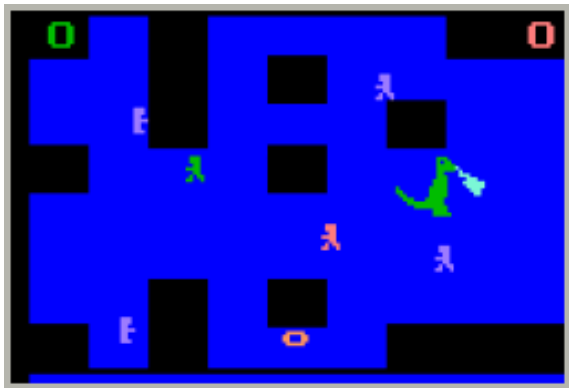


The Odyssey 2 was the Atari VCS' main competition for several years, but even as much as some ardent Odyssey fans (such as myself) still adore this system, there's no doubt that it was lacking in some areas. The Odyssey 2 initially fell behind in the race to produce games that mimicked popular coin-ops. At a time when such titles as "Haunted House" and "Adventure" caught on like wildfire for VCS owners, nobody had even conceived of an extended adventure game for the Odyssey; possibly because the system's hardware could barely support such a game.

Magnavox's answer was elegant and elaborate, driving the price of a single game cartridge up dramatically. The first Odyssey 2 adventure game, "Quest For The Rings," not only featured the ever-popular "multi-mode" cartridge, but it also included such extras as a rather nice-looking game board, pieces, and a keyboard overlay (which eliminated most of the keys from play, leaving only specific keys important to the game). The package was sturdier and easily twice the size of the normal Odyssey 2 game packaging. Even the instruction booklet was longer and larger than usual, with gold foil accents on its cover (also on the label of the cartridge itself). I don't think these things ever added to my enjoyment of the game, but they certainly added to the retail price.

Even with all the extras, "Quest For The Rings" **still** wasn't "Adventure" - not by a long shot. The game derived most of its complexity from the game board and the confusing rules for incorporating it into the game. The "quest" took place on the board, and the video game only came into play for action sequences. This is a bit of a crime, since the game cartridge was actually quite a lot of fun on its own and could easily be enjoyed without the game board and convoluted quest rules.

The video game component of "Quest For The Rings" was simple - two players choose their characters' classes (warrior, wizard, changeling, or phantom - does this remind you of D&D just a little yet?) and go into battle in a variety of environments. The dungeon environment is fairly straightforward, with maze-like configurations of walls. Shifting halls have walls that constantly slide across the screen, sometimes trapping both players and their adversaries.



Inferno rooms have walls of molten lava; normally a phantom can walk through walls, but in this room his power is useless. Crystal Caverns' walls vanish entirely - but you still can't walk through them unless you're a phantom.

All of these rooms could be randomly populated or pre-programmed with such menaces as armies of orcs, doomwinged bloodthirsts, the spydroth tyrantulus, and huge fire-breathing dragons, which could usually only be defeated by sacrificing one of the two players (not much of a sacrifice, really as both players would be alive and well at the beginning of the next room!). The game's objective was incredibly simple: to evade or fend off all of the above nasties and reach the glowing ring. The quest is completed upon the recovery of ten rings.

The Odyssey 2 has always been notorious among some gamers for its incredibly simple, and largely pre-programmed, graphics set. "Quest For The Rings," however, demonstrated that custom characters such as the dragons and spydroths were not an impossibility. (I hated the spydroths too - they jump on top of your man and devour him slowly. Ick!)

So, was the Odyssey 2 finally a contender in the adventure genre with "Quest For The Rings"? Well...barely. The game's higher price tag was a deterrent to some budget-minded gamers back then. With hindsight, it's possible that the cartridge could have been a hit with the elimination of the game board's elaborate trappings that only served to distract from a perfectly enjoyable video game. "Quest" has also become one of the more sought-after Odyssey games (providing one still has all of the original game pieces), along with the other Odyssey 2 video/board game hybrids, "Conquest Of The World" and "The Great Wall Street Fortune Hunt."

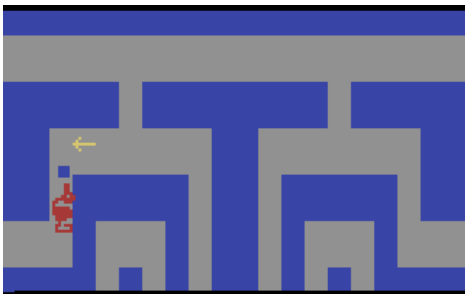
It may not have been a grand quest on the scale of "Adventure," but "Quest For The Rings" was certainly a worthwhile swipe at the genre for the Odyssey 2.

CGM

By Kyle Snyder

What is it exactly that keeps Adventure so close to the hearts of most classic gamers? This year marks the game's 20th anniversary, and certainly in that time frame we've had hundreds of games surpass Adventure's primitive charms. There was Advanced Dungeons and Dragons for the Intellivision, the Zork series for early home computers, the Legend of Zelda for the NES and Final Fantasy and its sequels for everything from the NES up to the PlayStation. Yet, to this day, Adventure for the Atari 2600 still manages to captivate players.

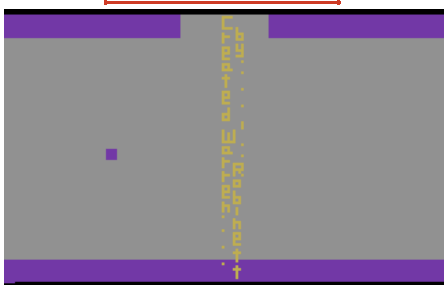
Why this game in particular? It's because it is both charmingly simple, and dauntingly difficult. It speaks to the inner child in all of us. Those of us who saw it brand new when we were six were blown away at all the things you could do. Whether you were busy searching catacombs, collecting objects, or slaying dragons, there was so much to interact with. I'm sure I speak for most of us when I say that when I play it and battle a dragon or rescue the golden chalice, I feel like that six year old again .



The Best Dragon's a Dead Dragon

Adventure's premise is that of fairy tale. An evil magician has stolen a golden chalice and stashed it elsewhere in the Kingdom. The player's task is to retrieve the chalice and restore it to its place of glory within the Gold Castle. However, the Kingdom does not comprise of simple straight roads lined with perfectly trimmed fruit trees. No, the Kingdom consists of catacombs that must be navigated with care to avoid losing your way.

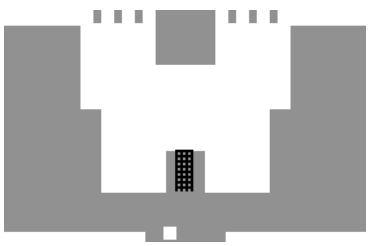
There are three castles: White, Black, and the aforementioned Gold Castle, of which all have corresponding keys scattered throughout the Kingdom. The keys must be located in order to gain entrance to the Castles. Then there are the dragons! Giant beasts with huge mouths, round bellies, and snake-like tails. Their main goal seems to be to swallow you (whole, no less) for lunch!



The Hidden Room

Sometimes these dragons wander aimlessly until they catch you in their sights and hunt you down. Other times they hover around certain objects, and challenge you when an attempt to grab the object in question is made. But luckily, you've found the sword! One quick stab with this saber will fell even the most fierce dragon. Just make sure the mischievous bat doesn't fly by and swipe the sword from your grip, making you vulnerable to the dragon's gaping jaws! You can also have a little fun and grab the bat when he flies by. He'll never harm you, but he can be tricked into grabbing a dragon (dead or alive) and whisking the vicious beast off to another part of the kingdom. Forget the fact that a tiny bat would ever have the strength to lift and carry a dragon . . . IT'S MAGIC! You can also get the bat out of your hair by locking him up in the Gold Castle. If you can accomplish this successfully, you won't have to worry about him for the remainder of the game.

Other objects abound as well. The bridge is a helpful item which allows you to access secret areas or scale a wall when you find yourself stuck at a dead end. The magnet pulls anything metallic towards you such as the sword, key, or bridge when you just can't seem to reach it yourself.



Adventure has three skill levels, which feature additional catacombs, fiercer dragons, and randomly placed objects. This beloved classic is also notable in another way . . . Adventure is the first video game to feature an "Easter egg," a secret, a hidden goal if you will, that places you in an elite club if you manage to complete it. It involves the bridge, a secret room in the Black Castle's labyrinth, and a "magic dot", which I personally prefer calling the "enchanted stone", thus keeping in the spirit of the game.

The story behind this secret says that Adventure designer, Warren Robinett, was miffed that Atari demanded anonymity from their designers. Nowhere on any Atari cartridge, nor in any instruction book is a designer credited. Warren decided to remedy the situation by programming a hidden room within the game. If the room was discovered, the player was greeted with a flashing credit, "Created by Warren Robinett."

The secret was well guarded by Warren until a young adventurer discovered it about 6 months after Adventure's release. Imagine what it would've been like to be the first person, aside from Warren, to see that sparkling message on the screen!

In some very early ads for what was to become the Atari 5200, back when it was referred to as the Atari Video System X, a stack of carts is displayed, and a brown box is shown with the word "ADVENTURE" on the side. It is not known whether any programming was done on a 5200 version of Adventure, but I have a feeling that even though the graphics would have been better, and the levels larger, the original 2600 Adventure would still be as coveted as it is today. Congratulations to Warren Robinett for creating such a wonderful game!

Adventure is a fantastic game that really stands the test of time. If you don't already own a copy, by all means make it your first priority. If you already own it, then you know the sheer bliss when the whole screen sparkles as the chalice is returned to the Gold Castle.

CASTLE HASSLE

By
Kyle Snyder

The Atari home computer series is not typically what one thinks of when asked about the better video game systems of the early 80's. But why not? The Atari 8-bit computer line (400, 800, 1200) provided some of the best graphics, gameplay, and outright fun that could be had on your parents' 19" Zenith. Due to the fact that it was a computer, people probably tended to think of using it for application-style software such as home finance, word processing, or educational offerings. But we CLASSIC GAMERS know the Atari 8-bit library is filled with wonderful arcade style challenges, clever puzzles, and an adventurous atmosphere, all which result in exceptional replay value. One game in particular that combines all these elements is Roklan's CASTLE HASSLE.

CASTLE HASSLE was actually designed by a smaller outfit called JV Software, and marketed in cartridge format by the good folks at Roklan. The game is unique for a variety of reasons, the most striking of which is the player's character. You're a GHOST! Yes, a spook, a specter, a spirit. That which is usually reserved for the enemy in other games (Haunted House, Crystal Castles, and of course, Pac-Man) is your ally in this adventure. The plot is simply to control this ghost while he searches for treasure in a giant castle. The ghost has the ability to transform into useful objects (more on this later) but generally just has to rely on evasiveness, cunning, and intelligence to complete his mission.

The game begins in a sparse "H" shaped room with doorways to other rooms at each of the four points of the "H." Passing through a door places you in a treasure room, wherein various traps have to be bested before you can escape with the prize. Many times, a monster, such as a pulsating amoeba, stealthy squid-type thing, or tiny rat, will attempt to capture you. In this case, pressing the joystick button will transform you into a gun, which is easily aimed and fired to dispose of the pesky foe.

Other obstacles include a room's configuration. In one room, a "Z" shaped corridor seems like a weak challenge, until you discover that touching ANY wall sends you back to the starting point. And the diagonal shaped corridor isn't the same angle produced when you hold the joystick in a diagonal, so there's a lot of readjustment when trying to float down toward the treasure. Then there's a room in which three little blocks appear, and you have to figure out the precise pattern of touching these blocks in order to uncover the prize.

Other rooms feature mazes, crushing walls, monsters that come back to life, and long corridors riddled with bullets that you must traverse.

Ah yes, the useful objects. Aside from the gun, our friend the ghost can also transform into a magnet, a torch, a hammer, a key, and a shovel. Mastering how and when these objects are used adds to the challenge.

Unfortunately, Castle Hassle's graphics are a little bare. The rooms are white wall outlines, sometimes decorated with simple chairs or tables. It looks almost as if they were going for a vector game look. The ghost himself (or herself) floats in the spectral breeze, lazily waving back and forth. The useful objects look exactly like they're supposed to, and the various monsters and treasure range from clearly defined to, "What the hell is THAT supposed to be??"

I am not recommending Castle Hassle for the graphics, however. The gameplay is top shelf and stands up over a long session of playing. As each room offers a different challenge, some reflexive and some intellectual, you are left with that "let me try for JUST ONE MORE!" feeling that is absent from so many of today's titles.

Castle Hassle seems to owe a debt to Venture. Both games feature an exploring character attempting to retrieve treasure from various rooms, but the similarities end there. JV Software and Roklan have created a great game that will provide new challenges each time you play it.

CGM

Pitfall

Created by: Activision
Designed by: David Crane
Platforms: Atari 2600, Intellivision, ColecoVision
Released: 1982

There may not be a person alive who hasn't played "Pitfall." This is the game that put Activision on the map. Race against time as you guide the legendary Pitfall Harry through the jungle in his quest to find a fortune in hidden treasure. Snapping crocs, rolling logs, fires, deadly scorpions, and hissing cobras block our hero's efforts.

Odds are if you bought Pitfall when it was originally available, you couldn't get the cellophane off fast enough to pop the game in your 2600. And what a treat! Vibrant greens, smooth animations, no screen flicker, and best of all, Harry lets out a Tarzan yell while swinging on vines.

Memorable moments: Finding your first treasure, jumping clear of a scorpion, and learning where to stand on the crocodile's head so you don't become breakfast.

Overall Rating: A

Pitfall

Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns

Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns

Created by: Activision
Designed by: David Crane
Platforms: Atari 2600, Atari 5200, ColecoVision
Released: 1984

If you've never played "Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns," do yourself a favor and find a copy immediately. Believe it or not, it's better than the original.

This time around, Pitfall Harry descends deep into the caverns of Peru in order to rescue his cat, Quickclaw, his girlfriend, Rhonda, and recover the Raj Diamond. To fulfill his goals, Harry must contend with electric eels, swooping bats, attacking condors, and deadly toads.

The Atari 2600 version has several groundbreaking elements. First, this game is huge! You would never think an Atari cartridge could cover so much territory. Second, magic red crosses work as "save points" so you won't have to start over from scratch if you die. Third, Pitfall Harry gets a recurring snappy new theme song, which surprisingly never becomes annoying.

The Atari 5200 version features a second, different adventure once you complete the first.

Memorable moments: Falling down the waterfall. Catching your first balloon ride.

Overall Rating: A+

Jungle Hunt/Jungle King

Produced by: Taito, Inc.
Platforms: Arcade, Atari 2600, Atari 5200, ColecoVision
Released: 1982

When this game was originally released in the arcades as "Jungle King," the folks who owned the "Tarzan" copyright felt the likeness to the vine swinger was violating their turf. So, the "Tarzan" theme was scrubbed, the game was renamed "Jungle Hunt," and Tarzan was swapped for an explorer sporting a pith helmet. Not as exciting, but it will do in a pinch.

The idea is to time swing your way from vine to vine, swim up a crocodile-infested river, dodge rolling boulders, and save your lady love (who has been busy partying with the natives in their cool, jet black hot tub).

In the arcade version of Jungle King, our hero manages to get his hair dyed for every new level. It goes from black, to blonde, to red. I'm not sure about the pith helmet guy's hair since it's covered. Only his hairdresser knows for sure.

Surprisingly, the home versions are remarkably strong conversions. Even the Atari 2600 version manages to pack in all the levels.

Memorable moments: Walking into the arcade and finding "Jungle King" replaced by "Jungle Hunt." Something was definitely lost in the conversion.

Overall Rating: B

Jungle King (arcade)

Riddle of the Sphinx

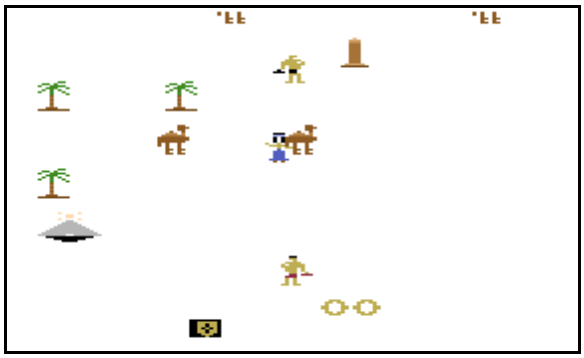
Created by: Imagic
Designed by: Bob Smith
Platforms: Atari 2600
Released: 1982

Travel through the Valley of the Kings collecting Egyptian artifacts, while avoiding getting stoned (not that kind of stoned!) and robbed. Once you get to the Sphinx himself, you must make the proper offering to win the game.

When this was released, Imagic ran a contest with a prize of $1000 to the first person who could solve the "Riddle of the Sphinx." It was eventually won by a guy by the name of Charles Compton. He presented his answer on Papyrus-like paper, illustrated with authentic Egyptian hieroglyphics, including a way ancient Egyptians might have written "Imagic" if the company had existed back then. He was 30 at the time, which is bad news for all of us who thought we just might outgrow our dweebiness at some point.

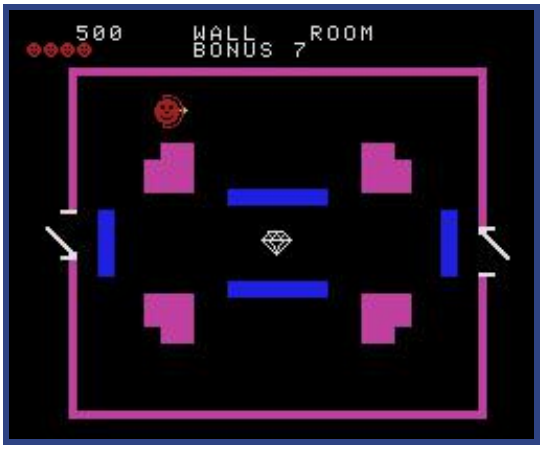
Memorable moments: The instruction manual informing you that you had to kiss Isis' filthy, sandy feet. Reaching the Sphinx and not having a clue what to do.

Overall Rating: B-



Riddle of the Sphinx

Venture



Venture

Created by: Coleco
Platforms: Arcade, Atari 2600, ColecoVision, Intellivision
Released: 1982

Guide Winky (a smiley face sporting a bow and arrow) through monster-infested halls and enter creature-plagued rooms in order to capture the treasures held within. If you take too long to collect the treasure, the Hall Monsters will come in the room to kill you. So snap it up!

Venture was another arcade "sleeper" brought home for the ColecoVision. Coleco also had a propensity for creating feeble versions of their games for other systems, so don't even bother with the Intellivision or Atari 2600 versions.

The ColecoVision version features three levels of simple, colorful graphics and a collection of unusual music and sound effects. Venture will keep you challenged if played at the higher difficulty levels.

Memorable moments: Wondering what would happen when you collected all l the treasure. Learning nothing happens when you collect all the treasure, except the game starts over.

Overall Rating: A

Haunted House

Produced by: Atari
Platforms: Atari 2600
Released: 1981

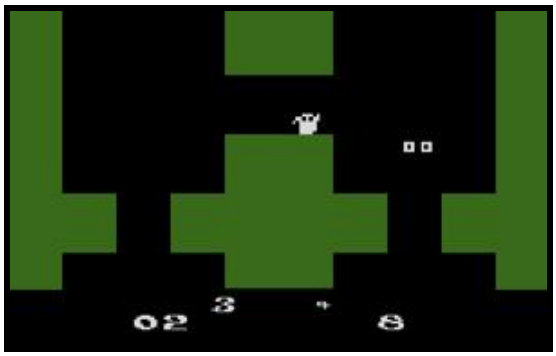
Haunted House was the follow-up to the immensely popular "Adventure." While it didn't quite measure up to that masterpiece, it isn't too shabby. You begin your quest with 9 lives and an unlimited supply of matches to explore a dark, drafty mansion in search of a golden urn. Why a person would desire a cup filled with some old man's ashes is beyond me.

Hindering your mission are ghosts, bats, and tarantulas whose deadly touch will cost you a life. The trick is to see how few matches you can use while you search for the treasure.

Haunted House is an excellent "atmosphere game." The darkness, combined with wind and lightning flashes, can actually spook you a bit if played in the proper setting. So turn off those lights, pop in the cartridge, and turn up the volume!

Memorable moments: Having your match blown out by the wind. Completing the game without losing any lives.

Overall Rating: B



Haunted House

Montezuma's Revenge

Created by: Parker Brothers
Platforms: Atari 2600, Atari 5200, ColecoVision
Released: 1984

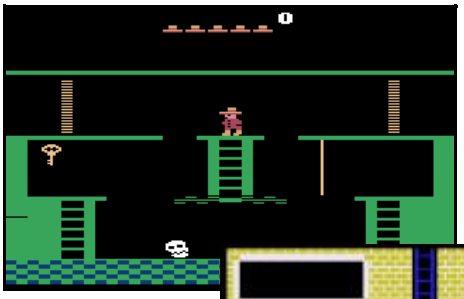
Help "Panama Joe" explore ancient Pyramids in search of long lost treasures. "Panama Joe"…"Pitfall Harry"… sorry, just thinking out loud.

Not a bad game for a "Pitfall" rip-off, and all three versions are equally impressive. Even the Atari 2600 Version is huge in scope, spanning over 60 rooms in three immense pyramids. All versions feature colorful rooms with clever animations. The controls can be a bit frustrating at times and will certainly cause you to screw up multiple times.

Memorable moments: Dig those rolling skulls!

Game Notes: Montezuma's Revenge is a difficult to find cartridge.

Overall Rating: B



Atari 2600

ColecoVision

Tutankham

Tutankham (ColecoVision)

Created by: Parker Brothers
Platforms: Atari 2600, ColecoVision, Intellivision

Delve into King Tut's Tomb in search of a wealth of treasures while avoiding the crypt's aggressive monsters.

Some people swear by the Atari 2600 version of Tutankham. I say don't bother with it as the controls will drive you absolutely daffy. Instead, find a copy of the ColecoVision version for more enjoyment.

ColecoVision's Tutankham is sort of like "Lady Bug" on acid. While you wander through the maze of catacombs, odd looking creatures will appear out of warp portals and hunt you down. Shoot them down, find the treasures, and continue on to the next level. Sorry, no vegetable bonus here.

Game Notes: The Intellivision version is an extremely difficult find.

Overall Rating: C

Dark Chambers

Produced by: Atari
Designed by: John Palevich
Platforms: Atari 2600, Atari 7800
Released: 1988 (yeah, that late. Programmed in 1983)

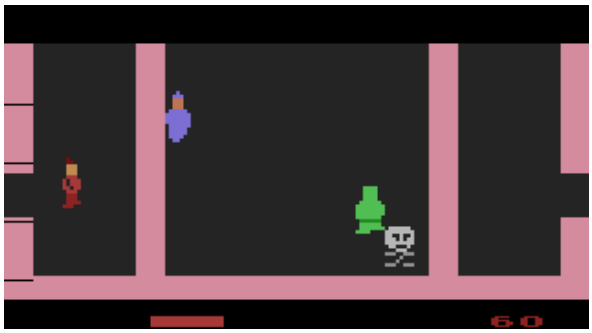
Atari was definitely trying to cash in on the success of Gauntlet with this poor excuse for a game. Explore many levels of dungeons in search of treasures. Roaming evil wizards, skeletons, and grim reapers will zap you of your strength, but it can be replenished by finding potions.

Dark Chambers is about as exciting as an old shoe horn. While the 7800 version offers a bit more variety, it's still lacking the "fun factor." The two player version allows you to bring a companion along, which does help relieve some of the boredom, but not by much.

Bland graphics, bland sound, and unoriginal gameplay combine for a game you probably won't play very often.

Memorable moments: Noticing the huge number of levels they crammed onto a 2600 cartridge. But that's about it.

Overall Rating: D



Dark Chambers (2600)

Gauntlet

Produced by: Atari
Platforms: Arcade
Released: 1985

Playing Gauntlet alone is enjoyable, but playing Gauntlet with three other people is an event. Up to 4 players work in cooperation, roaming dungeons in search of treasure. Standard characters include an elf, a wizard, a warrior, and a valkyrie. If your health gets too low, you can either have your character eat some food, or you can do what excites the arcade owner and drop more quarters into the machine.

Memorable moments: Everyone working as a team, until the food appears. Then it's every man for himself!

Overall Rating: A

Castle Wolfenstein

Produced by: Atari
Designed by: Silas S. Warner
Platforms: Apple II Computers
Released: 1981

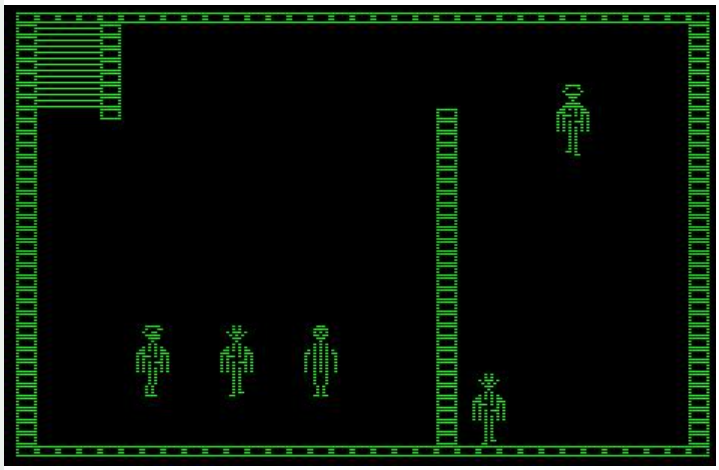
No, not the 3D version, although you could argue that this is the game that started the Doom/Quake phenomenon.

You find yourself trapped deep within a Nazi fortress and must find your way out. Along the way you'll kill Nazi's and their deadlier SS counterparts. Opening up the locked trunks will reward the player with useful items such as bullets and bulletproof vests, as well as worthless items such as Schnapps (>Hic!<). Score a major promotion if you can locate the war plans before you escape. Incredibly addicting game.

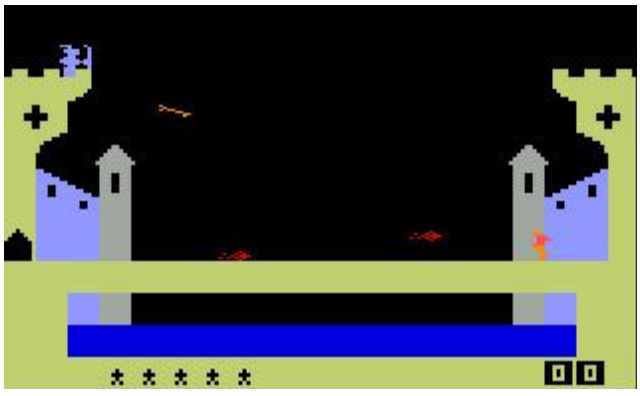
The sequel allows you to kill Hitler in his bunker. It was also remade later as a 3D, first person shooter, which then begat Doom.

Memorable moments: I had a friend who was very addicted to this game. One night he sleepwalked, sporting nothing but his underpants, approached his mom who was reading a book on the couch, pointed his fingers like a gun and told her to "Stick 'em up!" Unfortunately, she refused to give up the war plans.

Overall Rating: A+



Castle Wolfenstein (Apple II)



Dragonfire (Intellivision)

Dragonfire

Produced by: Imagic
Designed by: Bob Smith
Platforms: Atari 2600, Intellivision
Released: 1982

A dragon has overthrown the ruling monarchy, stolen their treasures, and has claimed squatters rights to the castle. What he wants with these things is beyond me, but it's up to you, the prince, to reclaim the treasures.

The object is to run across the drawbridge, and by either jumping or ducking, avoid the dragon's deadly fireballs. There is also some guy on the castle tower, who oddly enough has allegiance to the dragon, shooting arrows at you. Once you make it across the bridge, you must scramble around the treasure room, collecting the loot while the dragon spits fire at you.

Game Notes: Both console versions are extremely similar. The Atari version is easier to control, but lacks the arrow shooting element.

Overall Rating: B-

H.E.R.O.

Created by: Activision
Designed by: John Van Ryzin
Platforms: Atari 2600
Released: 1983

Miners have been trapped inside Mount Leone thanks to a volcanic eruption. Now it's up to Roderick Hero to save the day. Definitely one of the more engrossing games for the 2600.

This game is sort of like Pitfall II, if Pitfall Harry had stolen Lex Luthor's flying apparatus. The early levels are easy enough, but as the game progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to find your way to the sullen looking miners. Speaking of which, you'd think the miners would be a little happier to see their rescuer. Perhaps it's just the lack of oxygen.

As Roderick, you get to shoot lasers from your helmet and detonate TNT to destroy the rock walls blocking your path. Very destructive and very fun!

Memorable moments: Finding the raft. Constantly touching the lava and screaming expletives.

Overall Rating: A

H.E.R.O.

Superman

Created by: Atari
Designed by: John Dunn
Platforms: Atari 2600
Released: 1980

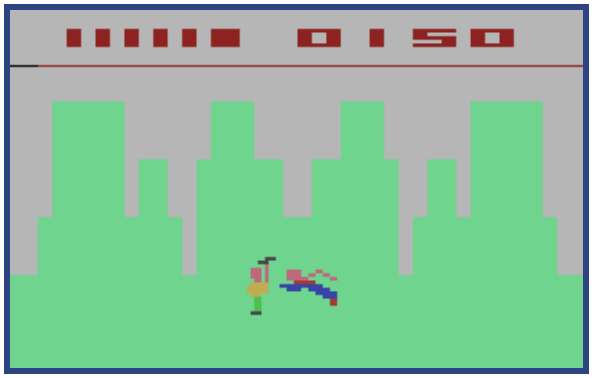
Lex Luthor and his band of unmerry men have blown up the Metropolis Bridge and are on the loose. It's up to Superman to round up the gang, put the baddies behind bars (without a trial, no less!), and rebuild the bridge.

Superman definitely ranks in the top 10 of all Atari 2600 games. It's fast paced and captures the essence of Superman. You get to utilize his x-ray vision, avoid kryptonite, kiss Lois Lane, change from Clark Kent to Superman (and vice versa), and moonlight as a bridge building engineer. The replayability factor is high due to the fact that you are timed on how long it takes to complete the objectives.

I'll even go so far to say that this version of Superman blows the current N64 game away! Of course, that really isn't saying much if you've played the N64 version.

Memorable moments: Completing the game in under 2 minutes.

Overall Rating: A+



Superman

Spider-Man

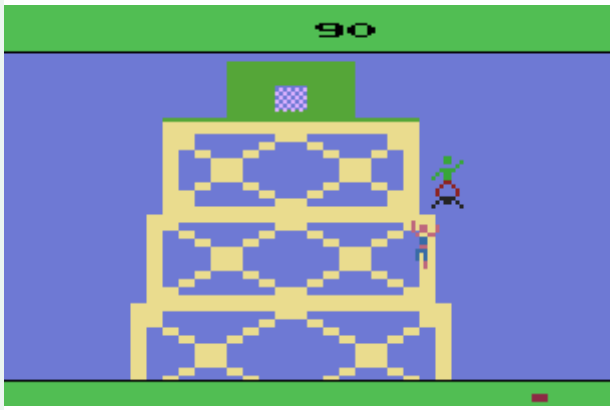
Produced by: Parker Brothers
Platforms: Atari 2600
Released: 1982

I think it's a given that Spider-Man is much cooler than Superman. Spidey just has that certain "Je ne sais quoi" that ol' Supes is lacking. So, why does his videogame suck so bad?

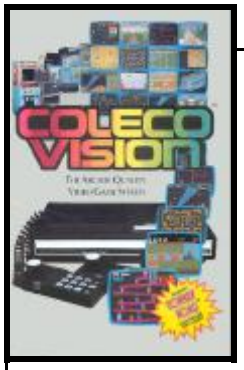
Parker Brothers developed a game that is about as action packed as a bag of rice. The object is to climb a rather stiff looking Web Slinger to the top of a building in order to defuse a bomb the Green Goblin has planted. Criminals in windows make feeble attempts to stop Spidey, and the Green Goblin makes a similar effort as he lazily floats back and forth across the screen. Once you defuse the bomb, the screens repeat, ad nauseum. The only fun activity is to shoot webbing and make Spider-man swing from side to side.

Memorable moments: Catching Spidey in the nick of time on the side of a building while he's plummeting towards the ground.

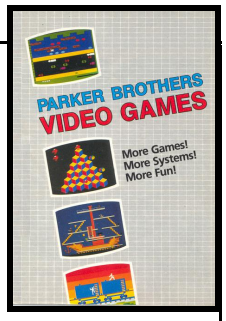
Overall Rating: D



Spider-Man



Promises, Promises



Videogame companies often got ahead of themselves and announced games that would never see the light of day.

Below are three examples of adventure games that were printed in Parker Brothers' and Coleco's catalogs but were never released to the general public.

THE INCREDIBLE HULK™

In this video game, you're Bruce Banner—alias THE INCREDIBLE HULK. Bizzare city creatures have captured his girlfriend, Betty, and you must rescue her! Dash through a maze of ever-moving streets and buildings in this unique tri-level metropolis. Climb ropes or jump down open manholes to reach different levels. Pick up gamma charges along the way and become THE INCREDIBLE HULK whenever these city creatures attack. Save Betty, and find the antidote that will rid Bruce Banner of this terrible curse—before it's too late! 1 or 2 players

Atari Video Computer System
(graphics shown)
Sears Video Arcade

THE HULK: Copyright © 1983 Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. THE HULK and the distinctive likeness thereof are trademarks of the Marvel Comics Group and are used with permission.

TUNNELS & TROLLS™

FANTASY GAME CARTRIDGE
#2441 TUNNELS & TROLLS™
This fantasy role-playing game for one to four players puts you into an adventure of the most fascinating kind. Your expedition involves your entrance into a mysterious dungeon made up of uncharted hallways and hidden chambers. You enter in search of priceless treasures. But—the underground is populated by monsters. Choose to fight or run! Select from a variety of weapons, cast magic spells or use your wits to defeat the monsters and claim the treasures! Will you emerge victorious?

TUNNELS & TROLLS™ is a trademark of Flying Buffalo, Inc. © 1975 Flying Buffalo, Inc.

A one screen demo is all that exists of "Tunnels and Trolls" for the ColecoVision

THE LORD OF THE RINGS™ JOURNEY TO RIVENDELL

THE LORD OF THE RINGS, JOURNEY TO RIVENDELL is a new adventure game based on the fantasy novels by J.R.R. Tolkien. Relive the adventures of Frodo as he travels from his home in the Shire to Rivendell. You'll face constant choices as you journey through Middle Earth, trying to avoid the Black Riders. Use the unique map to pinpoint your location as you move through more than 2000 exciting screens. 1 player

Atari Video Computer System
(graphics shown)
Sears Video Arcade
Atari Home Computers

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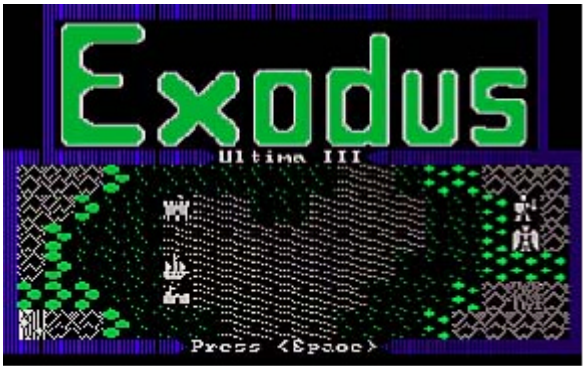
Ultima
A Legend Through Time

by Earl Green

If Adventure and Haunted House defined adventure games for the early consoles, it would be hard to find a game that exemplifies that genre on vintage computer systems, as well as the Ultima series.

Richard Garriott created the first Ultima game, an extremely simplistic game which was barely a step away from a text-based game as a follow-up to an entirely text-based game called Alakabeth. Ultima went over better than anyone expected, and was followed up very quickly with Ultima II: Curse of the Enchantress. The second game was more elaborate in scope and in its graphic look, and it ventured into territory that none of the other Ultimas have touched since: Ultima II opens on Earth, but then offers voyages to other planets in the solar system ! (I always remember the bizarre Earth map from Ultima II, featuring very small-scale, blocky approximations of the various continents; judging by how much space one's character took up on these maps, one's character must have been approximately 300 miles in diameter!) Ultima II also introduced the keystroke commands which became standard for the next several installments.



Ultima III was where the series really began to kick into gear. Set firmly in the non-earthly realm of Sosaria, Ultima III: Exodus pitted not just one character, but a party consisting of up to four characters, against an ultimate evil that could only be defeated after some very specific quest objectives had been met and preparations had been made. It was possible to travel to the island where the last battle was to be fought before undergoing all of the pre-requisite trials...but anyone foolish enough to do so would *not* last very long. Ultima III, with its cloth map and the ability to interact, (at least on a very minimal level, with non-player characters in towns and castles), was an engrossing adventure gaming experience that robbed me of countless hours of my adolescence. Ultima III also introduced a feature that was a seed of a much greater development for the future of the series: if you stole money or goods from someone in a town, the guards would come after you (and, more than likely, kill you in the ensuing battle - so much for just facing misdemeanor charges and then getting on with your life).

Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar drastically changed the nature of the Ultima games, and introduced some sweeping changes to the genre as well. Compared to Ultima III, the fourth Ultima game took place on a *huge* map, peppered with castles, towns, tiny villages, and even ruins of fallen cities. At the beginning of Ultima IV, the player was asked several questions by a "fortune teller." The questions were very shades-of-gray ethical and moral challenges to which there was no real right or wrong answer - there was no perfect formula to answer them in such a way that would make the game easier, faster, or better for you. These questions were a reflection upon the player's own leanings, and determined the makeup and class of his character.

Like Ultima III, Ultima IV challenged you to defeat an ancient evil (which, once again, was sequestered away in a very well-protected and hard-to-reach island fortress), but the heart of the game was the player's own elevation above that evil. In Ultima IV, an essential part of your quest was to attain enlightenment in each of the eight virtues. In other words, you were required to live by a certain code of honor and prove that you were better than the evil plaguing the land of Britannia. Bravery, compassion, honesty, justice, and so on all had to be upheld consistently. Interactivity with non-player characters at various locations was increased to give you the ability to answer truthfully or lie (and believe me, the latter *would* catch up with you later). Killing wild creatures who were protecting their territory would count against you, as opposed to killing evil or undead enemies. Ultima IV single-handedly elevated the adventure game genre above the level of killing your enemies and then going through their wallets.

Ultima V

Another feature of Ultima IV was that you started out alone on your quest and, provided that your alter ego had acted justly and fairly, you would meet

"Although a simple fisherman, thou art also a skilful swordsman. Thy Lord dost seek to assemble a peacetime guard. Dost thou A) Answer the call, so that all may witness thy valor; or B) Humbly decline the offer to join thy Lord's largely ceremonial knighthood?"

Ultima VI

Ultima II Map

various NPCs who would join you on your quest. After being surrounded by one too many parties of orcs while fighting solo, there's nothing quite so relieving as the words "I would join thee" in conversation mode.

Ultima V: Warriors of Destiny effectively doubled the size of the "world," but, unlike previous releases, retained the general outline of the map of Britannia used in Ultima IV. (The ruins of the isle of evil could even be found if one went looking.) Ultima V took up the equivalent of eight floppies, as opposed to Ultima IV's filling up two double-sided disks. (You *do* remember 5 1/4" floppies, don't you?)

Ultima VI

In Ultima V, a new darkness has enveloped the land, and Lord British - who is not only author Garriott's alter ego, but the player's chief benefactor and advisor - has mysteriously vanished. Called back into action, the player was surrounded by the band of loyal NPCs gathered during the course of Ultima IV and was dispatched to find Lord British and, naturally, vanquish that pesky, ever-present evil that seemed to follow wherever you went.

Though it too began with the fortune teller sequence which determined your character's class and stats, and kept Ultima IV's map, Ultima V introduced further big changes to the series. Where Ultima IV kept track of the phases of the two moons for magical purposes only, Ultima V could literally leave you in the dark if you went wandering around the countryside at night. And the worst horrors roamed in blackest night, naturally, so it was always wise to find a town or village before sundown and rent a room until daylight. Though the graphics were still very two-dimensional, Ultima V paid great attention to the amount of light given off by the sun, the moons, street lanterns, torches, and so on. The degree to which you could interact with non-player characters was increased even further, and even the 2-D graphics set was refined and expanded tremendously. Though a lot of floppy-swapping and disk-flipping was needed, Ultima V was a real treat for those who'd spent so many hours with its predecessor: a true sequel in every sense of the word. The landscape was peppered with numerous homages to Ultima IV, including collapsed entrances at the sites of the previous game's various dungeons.

Ultima V

With Ultima VI, the Ultima series began exploring vaguely 3-D graphics and a more complicated control scheme, abandoning the well-established keyboard commands that so many longtime players had found to be so instinctive. There are now nine Ultima games - technically eleven, if one counts the two distinct parts of Ultima VII and Ultima Online. The negative response to the recent crash-prone Ultima IX may mean the end is in sight (if it hasn't already arrived) for the first great series of adventure games to grace home computers. Since acquiring Richard Garriott's Origin Systems, Electronic Arts has done all of us old adventurers a favor by compiling the first seven Ultimas onto a single CD-ROM, along with video interviews with Garriott, an updated version of Alakabeth, and other goodies. This budget-priced collection can usually be found hovering at around the ten dollar mark at your local software store, and is a tremendous classic gaming bargain.

Why am I so fond of the Ultima series? Admittedly, the second game frustrated me immensely (and took some really ill-advised detours in the plotline of the series, what with its earthbound starting point and its trips into space), and the third game almost lost me before I managed to reach the end. But Ultimas IV and V fascinated me for what seemed like endless hours. I can't remember how many days I would come home from school and immediately lose myself in the quest to save the land of Britannia, while my homework sat untouched until it was bedtime (But by God, I memorized the mantras of the Eight Virtues!). I was then, and am still, enthralled by the moral subtext of the game, and the fact that my character - through the fortune teller's questions - was a real representation of me. Ultima III made a minor leap in giving such acts as theft or murder a consequence, but only a minor leap - you were only dead if the guards caught up with you. The fourth game in the Ultima series made the consequences more subtle (though, truth be told, the guards would *still* hunt you down) and far-reaching. If you behaved like an utter bastard, you'd *never* see the end of the game. My teenage years were a large, black, quivering mass of emotional chaos, and here was a computer game telling me to stay on the straight and narrow, or I'd never see the end of the story.

Having that message drilled into me at that point in my life was a pretty small trade-off for hundreds of man-hours' worth of adventuring. Some kids' parents were sending them to church three times a week and they still weren't getting that same message. I'd already given up the paper/pencil/dice form of role-playing games by my teens, as some of the underlying ideas were starting to bug me. But on a gut level, I thought the Ultima games were just plain cool - and even in my cynical adulthood, I can't find a better way to describe the Ultima series.

DragonStomper

A Dragonstomper's Guide to Defeating the Dragon.

Once upon a time, The Enchanted Countryside was a land of happiness and prosperity. Then, a Druid magician created an amulet so powerful, he would be able to control a dragon at his command and become invincible to whoever opposed him. When the magician entered the dragon's cave, he fell into a trap and lost his grasp on the amulet, which then skidded into the dragon's claw. The magician fled in terror and the amulet's power ultimately coursed into the dragon. With his new found power, the dragon became consumed with evil and unleashed his fury of black magic onto the once peaceful kingdom. Crops withered and died, quicksand pits and swamps trapped unwary travelers, and barbaric creatures attacked those who dared to travel through the countryside. Even the king's brave knights fell to the dragon's fierce warriors. All hope was lost in the kingdom.

You, the mighty Dragonstomper, must restore hope by traveling the countryside to defeat the dragon's many evil minions and collect objects and gold. Then, you must journey to the Oppressed Village and prepare for battle against the almighty dragon. Once you enter the dragon's lair, there will be no turning back until you meet face to face with the mighty beast himself.

Level I: The Enchanted Countryside

You are represented by a dot (sound familiar?) as you move about the countryside. You begin with 23 points of strength, 23 points of dexterity, and 400 pieces of gold. To move your Dragonstomper (dot), push your joystick in the direction you wish to travel.

Oh No! When Deranged Creatures Attack!

Enemies:

Warrior
Monkey
Slime
Maniac
Bug
Demon
Golem
Spider
Beetle
Scorpions

As you move your Dragonstomper, crazed creatures will randomly attack. For some reason, the first line from the "Theme from Dragnet" will play. Why? I have no clue. Now you are given the option (onscreen via your "action menu") to FIGHT, MOVE, or USE a weapon or magic spell.

Choosing to FIGHT will put you into battle with the creature. Each battle's action receives a blow by blow account onscreen. Creatures possess 10 points of strength, and the goal of the fight is to defeat your opponent by diminishing his strength to zero. Since they don't like you very much, he will be trying to return the favor. Since the action is "turn based," you will need to push your joystick in the direction of FIGHT to continue the battle.

A Warrior Answers His Door

Your other option is to simply MOVE away from the fight. Sometimes you'll manage to escape, but other times the creature will still take a few swings at you, which is not very sporting of him. MOVE is also necessary if you are involved in a fight and your strength is being depleted at a rapid rate.

To check how much strength and dexterity you possess, simply push your joystick down to STATUS on the action menu. This menu also allows you to view your gold and inventory listing.

Once you've defeated the creature, you will usually be given an object and some gold. You may also receive absolutely nothing for your efforts, except for a decrease in strength from fighting.

Some creatures are more easily defeated than others. The toughest foe you will face is the WARRIOR. It is recommended that you avoid fighting the Warrior until you've built up suitable strength and dexterity.

There are several ways to gain strength. One time consuming way is to avoid fights and let your strength build itself up over time. Another way is to find a Church. At the church you are given the option to DONATE or PRAY. While it doesn't hurt to try praying , odds are it won't do a thing for you, unless you are very low on money. Even then, the strength gain is not substantial. Your best bet at gaining strength is to donate 200 pieces of gold. Yes, it hurts to give, but if you are near death, this is a sure-fire way to get a quick strength increase. The third way of building strength is to USE one of your objects.

The Spoils of War

The objects you win in battle will vary and can be used for different purposes. Each time you begin a new game of Dragonstomper, the objects will randomly serve a different purpose than your last game.

The Cross, Ring, Staff, and Potion will either affect your strength and dexterity, or will locate the many traps

Paper Delivery

Time to Say Your Prayers

You Gain a Charm!

placed around the countryside

How do you check what an object is used for?

First, take note on the STATUS screen of your strength and dexterity levels. To test the objects you will need to have plenty of each.

Now USE an object. It will "Feel Weird." Check your STATUS immediately to see if there have been any changes and take note of them.

Note if the object decreases either your strength or dexterity, as you will not want to USE that object again. If you find the objects which *increase* your strength and stamina, you have found your ticket to winning battles with ease. It is best to have a pen and paper handy in order to write down what the various objects do. Fifty is the maximum amount of strength and dexterity you can have at any one time.

If you use an object and don't notice any change in either your strength or dexterity, then the object is a "trap locator." Traps can be found surrounding the various castles in the Countryside. If you suspect the object locates traps, simply get close to a castle and USE the object. Skulls, which indicate traps, will flash for a limited amount of time, so be quick in maneuvering around them. If you find yourself stuck in a trap, MOVE your Dragonstomper to escape. You will take damage for hitting a trap.

The Handaxe object has two purposes. It can be used quite effectively against an opponent during a fight. To utilize it during a fight, choose USE from the action menu until you see "Handaxe" listed and then press your joystick in the required direction. This will inflict much more damage to your adversary than simply choosing FIGHT. Quicker battles give you a greater chance of escaping unharmed. The Handaxe is the best weapon to use against a Warrior. However, here's the catch: The best way to obtain a Handaxe is by defeating a Warrior. So, you'll have to bear down on your first fight with a Warrior, defeat him in hand to hand combat, and hope he doesn't get the best of you. Another use for the Handaxe is for opening locked doors. This tactic will not open castle doors but will get you in Churches and Huts in a pinch and has even been known to open chests.

To get inside the castles, you must obtain keys. Keys will also open any chests you have in your inventory. Chests usually contain an object and 75 pieces of gold.

Castles 'n Traps

I.D.'s Please!

The Oppressed Village

Objects in your Inventory:

Handaxe
Charm
Cross
Shield
Potion
Chest
Ring
Staff
Keys

At the extreme east of the Country-

Temple Check

side, you will encounter a man guarding a bridge. You cannot cross the bridge unless you show him the proper I.D. Do not attempt to fight the guard. You cannot win. To obtain the required I.D., go to the flashing castle located at the extreme west of the Countryside. After defeating the creature inside, you will be given a PAPER. This is your I.D. By crossing the bridge, you will be taken to the second level of play, The Oppressed Village. It is unadvisable to cross the bridge unless you have many objects in your possession, full strength and dexterity, and at least 1600 pieces of gold.

Once you have built up your strength and dexterity and have a Handaxe in your possession, you will need a shield, which is located in the temple south of the bridge. Now it's show time. You're ready to pick some fights with the local nasties!

By maneuvering yourself into the various land variations, you can be sure to locate the bad guys. Aside from randomly attacking you, the creatures are generally found in specific areas. Slimes can be found in swamps; Warriors and Golems are found in the Huts; Snakes, Bugs, and Spiders are in the grassy areas; Monkeys are generally found in the trees; Maniacs and Demons are in the castles; and Scorpions are found in the pits. Your best tactic is to find them and USE your Handaxe with wild abandon. You will find your gold and inventory grow quickly. Certain creatures are prone to carry specific objects.

Warriors: Handaxes
Golems: Crosses
Slimes: Staffs
Monkeys, Snakes, Bugs and Spiders: Charms and Rings

Once you have a large inventory of objects and at least 1600 in gold, go to the bridge and show your I.D (Paper). Cross the bridge to enter the Oppressed Village.

The Oppressed Village (Welcome to the Windy City)

Upon entering the Village you'll see 3 buildings, 3 soldiers marching back and forth, and the entrance to the Dragon's Cave.

The Trade Shop

The three buildings are The Magic Shop, The Trade Shop, and The Hospital. Enter the Hospital first, where you can buy bottles that will help you on your journey to slay the dragon. However, before you buy anything, you need to sell all the possessions you gained in The Enchanted Countryside. You won't be needing them any longer and they're worth some dough. Go up to a merchant and begin the process of selling the objects. You won't get competitive bidding from the other merchants so the first place you come to is just as good as any other. None of the merchants will be interested in your PAPER. Think of it as a souvenir. Yes, you can work trades with your objects, but since you accumulated so much gold in the Enchanted Countryside, it won't be necessary to haggle. Simply selling everything is the quickest route to take.

Once your possessions are gone, you should have a good chunk of change. Now get ready to go on a shopping spree.

In the hospital buy all of the Vitamins, Elixir, and Medicine.

Your next stop is the Magic Shop. Buy everything.

Next, go to the Trade Shop and buy the following: (1) rope, (3) Sapphires, (4) longbows, (3) lanterns, and a chain. Now exit the Trade Shop to make a few final purchases.

Touch the marching soldiers and RECRUIT them from your action menu. If you offer gold, they will want 311 pieces. If you offer each of them a Sapphire, they will accept. Since the Sapphires only cost you 114 gold pieces, you will be saving yourself some money. At this point you should have a little bit of gold left. Feel free to spend the rest on what's left in the Trade Shop. Can't hurt. Can't help.

Prepare to Battle!

Now you are ready to enter the dragon's cave. Go to the cave entrance and choose to ENTER.

The Dragon's Cave "Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here"

The cave is littered with the remains of other Dragonstompers who have preceded you. The cave is also filled with deadly strength-depleting traps so be careful.

You will be moving upwards in order to reach the dragon's lair. Stay to the right in order to avoid most of the traps.

Travel until you just pass the set of skulls. Now USE one of the Visions in your inventory and move quickly upwards. You will see the first set of traps you need to avoid. Continue going up until you reach a set of moving poison darts blocking your path. Your best bet is to stay to the right and maneuver yourself around the darts.

Note: If you become sick with fever during any point of this journey, be sure to USE the Medicine you purchased from the hospital. If you lose substantial strength from any traps or poison darts, USE the Vitamins. The Elixir will restore your dexterity.

Those Aren't Welcome Mats!

Once you pass the poison darts, move until you just pass the next set of skeletons. USE a series of Visions until you arrive at the next set of poison darts. Get around these darts in the same manner you used to get past the others.

Now continue until the darts are not on the screen any longer. USE another Vision and move quickly to avoid the traps. Once those traps are no longer on screen, USE another Vision to see the traps which are blocking the pit in order to enter the dragon's lair.

The Dragon's Lair

Once you enter the lair, the rope will be used automatically. If you failed to purchase the rope, your strength will decrease when you fall.

You will now see the dreaded dragon guarding the amulet. The dragon will move towards you with fatal intentions.

If you wish to try and maneuver around the dragon to get to the amulet without killing him (extremely difficult), then you must USE the Unlock spell to open the gate in front of the amulet.

Unlike the other foes you faced in the Enchanted Countryside, the dragon's strength is 100 points. To beat him you will need to use a combination of brute force and powerful magic.

As long as the dragon is not touching you, you won't lose any strength. That is a temporary situation, of course, as the dragon will make his way towards you and eventually beat the hell out of you.

USE one of your recruited warriors and immediately follow up by USING the other two. There is a good chance that one of them may refuse once he sees his compatriots getting the crap beaten out of them. Simply wait a few turns before trying to USE him again. Eventually, the coward will join the fight. You see, by sending the warriors to fight, you are, in essence, sending them to their deaths. I have yet to see any of the warriors survive to the end of the battle. The good news is that they get in a few good licks on the dragon to bring his strength down, thus making your job a bit easier

The next step is to use some of the magic you bought in town.

USE Blast to inflict some major damage.

USE Stun to prevent the dragon from fighting back. This gives you and/or the warriors a brief period to administer more abuse without the dragon returning the favor.

USE Flash to blind the dragon, causing him to lose strength.

By this time it is likely that your recruited warriors are dead and the dragon is now very close, if not engaged in direct combat with you. Make no mistake…he will cause severe damage to your strength when he strikes you. Remember to keep tabs on your strength and to USE Vitamins to keep you strong.

USE Protect to save you from deadly attacks when the dragon is upon you.

USE the longbow as a weapon. Only use this as a last resort as you will find yourself missing your target quite frequently.

Once you have depleted the dragon's 100 points, he will die, a rousing theme of "Rule Brittania" will play, and the amulet is yours.

The curse has been lifted!
Long live the Dragonstomper!

RAIDERS OF THE LOST "J" Contest

Help Us Find the Lost Easter Egg!

After our Howard Scott Warshaw article was published last issue, we received a letter from an alert reader, Scott Stilphen. Scott wanted to know if we knew the whereabouts of a "strange object" hiding in "Raiders of the Lost Ark" for the Atari 2600. He directed us to a screenshot of Raiders, which was printed in the November 1982 issue of Electronic Games Magazine (shown at right). Sure enough, the screenshot shows Indy in the Valley of Poison next to a blue block with the letter "J" inside.

"Hmmmm….," we thought.

Donning our best Fedoras, we embarked on a mission to determinine the origin of the "Lost J." Our first stop was to the source, himself, Mr. Howard Scott Warshaw.

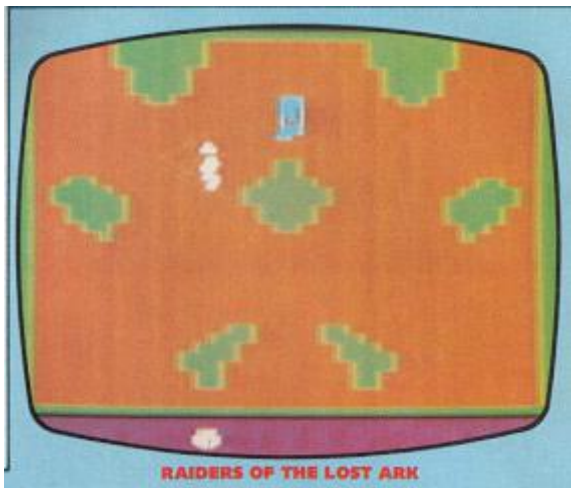
After threatening him with our whips, Mr. Warshaw told us: "If you'll notice the 'J' shape in this graphic, you will see that it is a signature by my graphic artist, Jerome Domurat. I wasn't the only one with Easter Eggs in my games! A most opportune screen shot indeed."

Naturally we asked him, "So, how can we find it?"

He replied, "I think it is findable, but I honestly don't remember exactly how. It's been a long time." Then he threw "E.T." cartridges at our heads until we left.

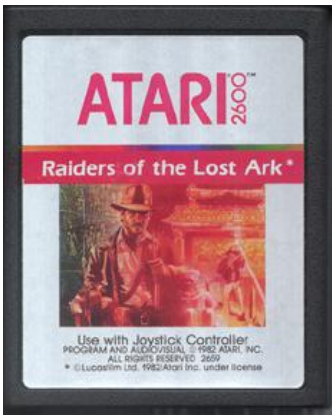
Just when we felt we hit a dead end, Jerome Domurat himself contacted us. He told us, "It's been a number of years since that was done. I can't remember how it was invoked. I do think it was in the finished cartridge since there was typically only one version of the code."

So, that's it! We're at our dead end. Now we're looking to you to help us find the "Lost J."



Prizes

- One Year Subscription to Classic Gamer Magazine
- Midway Classics 2 (PC Version)
- "Once Upon Atari" Video, Autographed by Howard Scott Warshaw
- Bragging Rights



How to Enter:

The first person to e-mail their verifiable solution (that works!) to us will receive a bevy of prizes. Send to: cav@classicgamer.com

Rules

1. Only e-mails with the solution will be accepted.
2. No contacting Howard Scott Warshaw or Jerome Domurat. We've already squeezed enough info from them.
3. No hair pulling.

BOREDQUEST: Unfinished Business

Did you ever wish Atari made a sequel to their hit game "Adventure"? Well, you're in luck because they did. Sort of. "Adventure II," as it was originally known, was intended to be similar to the earlier Adventure, only much grander in scale. In fact, the project became so enormous, they decided to break it up into four separate games. These games came to be known collectively as the "SwordQuest" series.

Each game would take the theme and name of its elemental counterpart: Earthworld, Fireworld, Waterworld, and Airworld. To sweeten the deal, Atari promoted a national contest to award valuable prizes to contestants who could solve each of the games by deciphering a series of clues. The clues would be found in comic books included with the games.

The winners from each competition would receive the following prizes valued at $25,000 each:

Earthworld: An 18kt solid gold Talisman with twelve diamonds and twelve other precious stones representing the signs of the Zodiac.

Fireworld: A platinum and gold Chalice decorated with jewels such as pearls, rubies, and sapphires

Waterworld: A gold Crown trimmed with valuable gems.

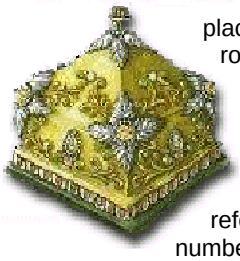
Airworld: The Philosopher's Stone, which was a large piece of white jade encased in a jewel encrusted 18kt gold box.

The winners from each contest would then compete to win the ultimate prize: a jewel-encrusted Sword with an

18kt gold handle, silver blade covered with emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and diamonds (no green clovers, though!).

If you wanted to get your hands on some of this loot, all you had to do was purchase the games, play them, and hopefully solve them with the help of the comic books. At that point you would mail your solution to Atari and hope you were one of the finalists. But make no mistake about it: These were incredibly boring games and totally unplayable without their comic book counterparts.

First up in the contest was SwordQuest: Earthworld. To solve Earthworld, players must run maniacally from room to room gathering objects and making sure they are placed in the appropriate rooms. Placing the correct object (or combination of objects) would cause a pair of numbers to appear. These numbers would then refer to a page and panel numbers to refer to inside the comic book. Inside the panel in question, you'd need to find words that were hidden in the artwork. The answer to Earthworld contained five words, but 10 words were hidden in the comic book. The question of which five words to pick was answered in the eleventh clue: a poem. The poem contained the highlighted words, "prime" and "number." So by only looking at the prime numbered page and panel numbers, would one determine which of the five words were needed.



For the record the solution is: QUEST IN TOWER TALISMAN FOUND. Yes, quite a few people figured that out and went on to compete to see who could win the Talisman in the Earthworld Finals.

On May 2, 1983, Steven Bell was that man. The contestants were given 90 minutes to compete head-to-head in specially programmed versions of SwordQuest: Earthworld. Clocking in at just 46 minutes, Steven Bell claimed the Talisman.

For the record, the contest was started with the phrase, "Gentlemen, start your joysticks!" Who says those Atari marketing folks didn't have a sense of humor? Quite frankly, I think a contestant should have been awarded bonus points for drop-kicking the announcer after he yelled that.

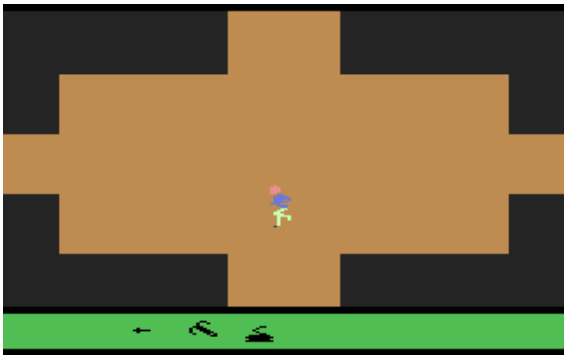
Next up was SwordQuest: Fireworld. Another snoozer of a game, which, again, has players running around from room to room, gathering objects and deciphering clues from their comic books.

The finalists of Fireworld met in San Francisco, CA. to fight it out and claim the Chalice. Michael Rideout was the proud winner of this contest. He somehow determined that the solution was based on "The Tree of Life," which can be found in the Jewish Cabala, as well as Tarot Cards.

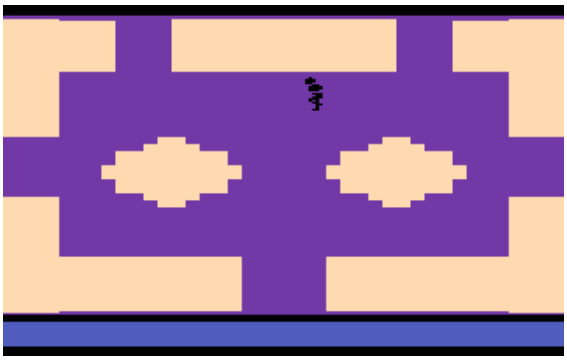
"Adventure II" Proto

Logically, the next step for Atari was to release the next game in the series, SwordQuest: Waterworld. This is where things tend to

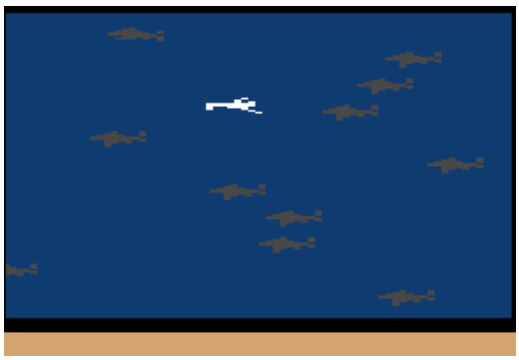
get a bit sticky. About this time, Atari was having difficulty maintaining its niche in the videogame market. In essence "The Crash" was beginning. As a cost cutting measure, Atari released Waterworld as an Atari Club exclusive. That is, you could only obtain it if you were a member. Very few of the games sold and since Atari was bleeding red financially, they just decided to scrap the entire tournament. So, the Waterworld contest never took place.



SwordQuest: Earthworld



SwordQuest: Fireworld



SwordQuest: Waterworld

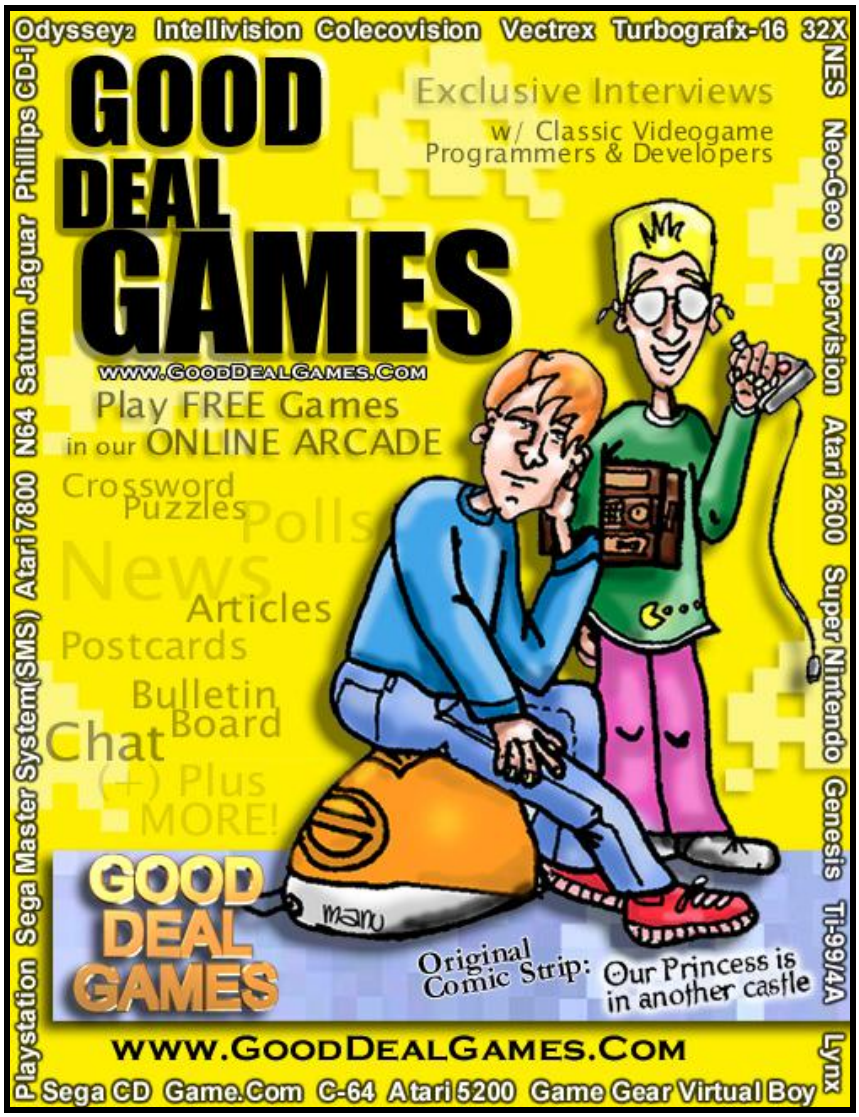
The Waterworld finalists were given $2,000 for their troubles and Steven Bell and Michael Rideout were each given $15,000 to call it quits.

This leaves two out of five prizes claimed. So, where are they, you ask? Earthworld winner, Steven Bell, apparently needed the cash and had his Talisman melted down, but kept a gold cross which was attached to it. Fireworld winner, Michael Rideout, still has his Chalice and keeps it stored in a safety deposit box. Where the other three prizes are remains a mystery. The popular rumor places them in the possession of Atari CEO at the time, Jack Tramiel. I'm sure they are quite the conversation pieces and the jewel-encrusted sword is quite the babe magnet.

The SwordQuest debacle is a prime example of good intentions, great marketing, and horrendous follow through. But I think the time has finally arrived. Now that Hasbro owns the rights to Atari, I'd love to see them finish what was started. The technology exists to create bland rooms and a boring game in realistic 3D! At the very least, let me be there when the guy from marketing proposes the idea to the Hasbro Suits. I just might recommend he not begin his pitch with, "Gentlemen...start your joysticks!"

CGM

Ed note: An interview with Fireworld winner, Michael Rideout, can be found online at:
www.atarihq.com/2678/swordqst.html


Odyssey2 Intellivision Colecovision Vectrex Turbografx-16 32X
Phillips CD-i Saturn Jaguar N64 Atari 7800 Sega Master System(SMS)
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FRIDAY THE 13TH

By Kyle Snyder

In the mid-to-late 1980's, at a time when the Nintendo Entertainment System had taken its place as most beloved home video game system, odd and unnecessary licenses began sprouting up all over the video game landscape. Manufacturers thought that by tacking a popular name and character onto a mediocre game, sales would go through the roof. They were mistaken. Remember "Yo Noid!," the abysmal platformer featuring the Domino's Pizza mascot? Or how about "Back to the Future"? Had Doc Brown and Marty known that game was on the horizon, they probably would have stayed in the '50s!

One license that looked like it would produce a similarly poor game was Paramount Pictures' "Friday the 13th." I mean, what else could they do other than have you constantly running in terror from everyone's favorite summer camp slaughterer, Jason Voorhees? The answer? A LOT. LJN created a great game involving strategic planning, resource management, and the traditional running and jumping motif so common to games of that era.

The game begins by showing you a map of Camp Crystal Lake and the surrounding grounds. Six camp counselors are smiling at you on the bottom of the screen, blissfully unaware of the situation you are about to send them into. BWAHAHAHAHAHAAAAAAAA!!!! (Sorry, got a little carried away there!) Anyway, you select a counselor, and the game switches to a side view (usually associated with games like Super Mario). Suddenly, zombies crawl up from the Earth and begin to aimlessly wander around. Touching the undead drains some life from your guy or gal. So, why not FIGHT BACK???? I mean, that's what the "B" button is for!

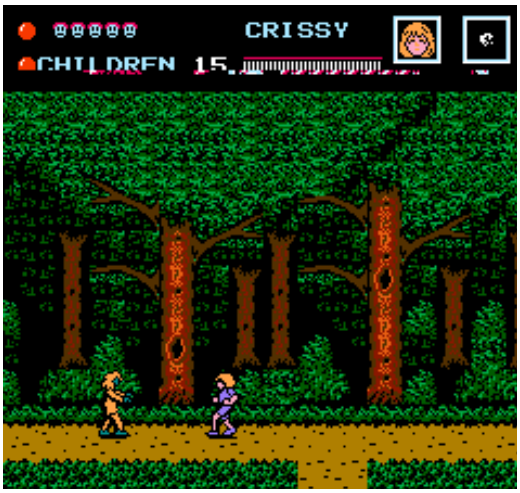
Jason Meets a New Friend

You start with an unlimited supply of rocks to throw, and can upgrade to knives, machetes, axes, and pitchforks. The more powerful the weapon, the better you can keep zombies at bay (and the wolves, ravens, and bats that you will encounter in other scenes). You can also jump over the baddies ("A" button), but it's so much more fun to pummel them.

But what's that? A strange beeping siren? Uh-Oh, that means the kids are in danger! Yes, this time, unlike the movies (except for Part 6), the children are actually ATTENDING the camp at the time of Jason's rampage! When you hear that siren, you better get hoofing over to the cabins on the edge of the lake. That's where you hid the children, but it seems that Jason's found them anyway. Entering the cabin, you find that Jason is in the next room, and you must save the children! Luckily you picked up a knife, so you can defend yourself with something other than rocks. A mano a mano battle with Jason ensues, and you are triumphant... this time.

You go back to exploring the grounds, and find that some of the cabins contain items, some contain notes tossed on the floorboards, and some contain your fellow counselors. Here is where the resource management part comes in. Suppose you've been controlling George, and he's been on the receiving end of too many zombie attacks. He's hurting bad, but he happens to hold an axe. George enters a cabin, and there's Crissy, happy and feeling healthy. At this point you have to decide, do you: (A) Exit George from the cabin, undoubtedly getting finished off by zombies and losing the axe, or do you (B) Give Crissy the weapon, so someone with full health can continue the fight? Having this ability to trade weapons with other counselors enables you to retain a powerful means of offense when a character is lost.

Oh jeez... there's those kids again! But Crissy is over on the opposite side of the camp! What's a girl to do? Ah-HAH!!! She whips out her cell phone and calls Laura, who's hanging out in a cabin much nearer the lake. Okay, okay, so there's no cell phones in this game, but you do have the ability to select a different counselor in an effort to reach the children faster. Furthermore, each counselor has a varying degree of speed, jumping height, and resistance to injury. Our old friend George is rather slow, and can't jump as high as the others, but he doesn't take nearly as much damage from the baddies. On the other hand, Crissy is quite the sprinter and reaches great height when she leaps, but she bruises easily. And lest you think this a sexist game, there ARE weak guys, and strong gals, and counselors with abilities in between, so it's very much like you're controlling a small "army" of fighters against the main foe... Jason Voorhees.



You gotta admire that Jason. He doesn't let anything get in his way... his single-minded goal of obliterating anybody who walks on his campground is his only

motivation for continuing on through life (and death!). Jason is usually wandering on the other side of the camp from where your counselor happens to be, but once in a while, paths cross, and you have to "shoo" him away with whatever weapon you are holding. Look out! Jason's got an axe! Whew! That was close! Maybe it's time to find a better weapon!

Weapons can be found by crouching or jumping at certain spots. You can also explore the cave and provided you have the key, can open the door to Jason's store room. Look at that! A nice shiny machete! I'd bet you'd just love to shove that right up Jason's... WOAAAAHHH!!! It's Mrs. Voorhees, the killer from the original film! Well, her head anyway. You see, when the survivor of the first film beheaded Mrs.V in self defense, her little boy Jason made a shrine to her in his storeroom. The shrine consisted of her mummified head, surrounded by weapons and fresh victims. And now Mama Voorhees wants to add you to the death toll! Her head flies around in a ghostly pattern, periodically swooping down to attack you. Destroy her once and for all, and you'll be awarded the machete.

The game gets quite frantic in higher levels when all but two counselors are dead, dusk is falling, the children are being attacked, and Jason is stronger than ever. A certain panic factor really encompases this game, especially if played in a dark room with no distractions.

There's a lot more to this game as well, like the vitamins that can heal you or another counselor, the lake itself that you may have to traverse in a rowboat, the sweater that grants you immunity to Jason's attacks, the torch that can be lit from the fireplaces in the cabins... My only complaint is that it can be a little TOO much to keep track of at one time. But, then, that's part of the challenge!

The graphics are pretty good. All the counselors look markedly different from one another, and Jason has his familiar gray outfit with the trademark hockey mask. The backgrounds are nice as well, conveying a serene environment that hides the true horror of the camp.

Set aside a few hours, and get ready to do battle with Jason and the demons of Crystal Lake. And if you see Crissy, tell her I want my cell phone back.

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Last Chance! Winners to be announced next issue!

WIN!

Win an autographed copy of **"Phoenix - The Fall and Rise of Videogames"** by Leonard Herman.

Classic Gamer Magazine is giving away two autographed copies of Leonard Herman's authoritative book about the history of videogames.

But ya gotta earn it!

We're looking for aspiring Longfellows and Maya Angelous!

Send either an original classic videogame poem or Haiku and we'll award Phoenix as a prize in each category.

One prize per category will be awarded.
Winners and select entries will be printed in a future issue.

Poem Example:

There once was a man who would boast,
"I'm the man who can eat the most"
Although he ate lots
He ate only dots
And occasional side-dish of ghost.

Haiku Example:

(A Haiku consists of a 3 line stanza with a 5,7,5 syllable pattern)

Donkey Kong climbs up
Crazy barrels do descend
Die Mario! Die!

- too embarrassed to admit

Send in your entry (with your contact info) to:

Classic Gamer Magazine
7710 Regents Road #343-213
San Diego, CA 92122

Or e-mail to: cav@classicgamer.com

EXPIRED

My Twenty Five Cents

by Damien Quicksilver

Video Games vs. Virtual Reality

The Battle of the New Millennium

I predict that lifelike virtual reality, fully integrated with the internet, will be in our homes by 2010. Virtual reality is a technology being rapidly developed right before our eyes, yet it's evolving gradually enough that most of you probably think nothing of it.

This isn't to say that you don't realize what's happening; it's just one of those things that's easier to deny. Partly because we fear it and partly because we want it SO BAD, we prefer to think of it as science fiction up until the very moment it is in our hands. We can no longer turn a blind eye to the fact that videogames have been "evolving" over the last twenty years to reach this inevitable conclusion.

VR Pac-Man

As classic gamers, I believe we share the feeling that the majority of modern video games are of less-than-memorable quality. Maybe we're not just opinionated and nostalgic; maybe we are 100% CORRECT. After all, would not an incomplete product generate an incomplete gaming experience? If the finished product IS virtual reality, then the latest generations of consoles are the incomplete "missing links" in this "evolution." There HAS to be something inherently WRONG with three-dimensional worlds on a two-dimensional screen.

But with the latest generation of games, the fully explorable 3-D worlds DO exist. That means the software for VR is already here. They've made stereoscopic 3-D glasses, and surround sound is rapidly becoming the norm. For total immersion, that's two senses down, three to go. And that's why the seemingly gimmicky "force feedback" controllers haven't died yet. Because force feedback isn't merely a gimmick, it's actually the next big thing; the third of our senses to be artificially stimulated. In ten years, telling gamers that they should not have to feel their game will be like telling today's gamers that they shouldn't have to hear their game. Taste and smell will eventually be simulated by chemicals. I suspect we will purchase taste/smell cartridges in much the same way that we buy ink cartridges for our printers today.

I hope I have painted the picture clearly enough that you can see how close VR really is. Once we accept that, the next step is to face the threat that it poses. This isn't just about "classic" gaming but the survival of video games as a media or as a "species." It's survival of the fittest. The games and gamers will have to adapt to survive in the world of VR.

So how are we to keep video games alive? What can WE do? Well, two conditions must exist if video games are to continue to thrive. Supply and demand. The easiest thing you can do is download and play games. If you're not keen on computer gaming, learn to be. Because the future of video games (especially the "classic" variety) lies in computers (and more specifically, in free computer games), it is inevitable that the market for video games will shrink dramatically once VR is deployed. And since that would make the commercial development of video games unlikely, the games will have to be made by impassioned gamers. This leads me to the second thing you can do - make a video game. If every single one of us made it our goal to make just one game within our lifetime, it would create a virtually imperishable reservoir of games. And if we passed that tradition on to the next generation... Video games can and MUST stay alive.

VR Missile Command

The final thing you can do for the cause is both the most difficult and the most abstract. We need to program VR games. Bear with me on this one. We all hear more and more about "convergence" in technology. You know the computers that you can watch TV and make phone calls on? These video phones are closing the gap between computers and consoles. Overpopulation causes your average individual's living space to become smaller and smaller, and the day will come that one's VR device will be the only entertainment/communication device in the home. There will be no room for consoles or old computers. And even if there IS room, VR will still be the most popular and a lot of people will spend the majority of their time there. This will be an ever-increasingly large segment of the population potentially isolated from "traditional" video games.

What if, however, because of some clever and thoughtful programmer, the virtual world had a virtual arcade machine of Pac-Man...?

No matter how exciting the prospect of experiencing force-feedback in your underwear may sound, let us not forget why we started playing video games in the first place. Video games have always been a pastime, an escape from the pressures of reality. Do we really want them to be MORE LIKE REALITY? Since the current generation of gamers are accustomed to their 3-D worlds, they will likely transition to VR without a second thought. YOU, as a classic gamer, are one of the chosen to fight this battle for survival. And it is a battle we must win. Otherwise, much as "Video killed the radio star," we will all be singing "Video games were killed by VR."

CGM

MEMORIES PAST

BY KYLE SNYDER

Last holiday season, my fiancée, Seleen, and I took the day off from our jobs to finish up our Christmas shopping. We started early in the morning and finished late in the afternoon. At one point, our travels found us about 50 miles from home in a shopping mall I used to frequent in the 80's: Forest Village Park Mall.

I remember visiting my Grandparents in the summer of 1979, when the big news was a brand new shopping mall being built a few miles away. My grandmother and I would drive by to see how the mall was coming along; the skeletal girders hinting at something fantastic to come. By the time the brickwork was climbing to the roof, we knew a Mecca of consumer bliss was not too far away.

My Grandmother and I were among the throng of people attending the grand opening, and I was able to peruse the record store (remember records?), the bookstore, and of course, Kay Bee. Initially, I was disappointed when I discovered there was no arcade anywhere. How could this be??? After feeling a little disheartened, I saw it. Well, the beginnings of it, anyway. A store space that hadn't opened yet had a giant white plaster wall proclaiming "Coming Soon: Time Out Family Fun Center." I was relieved.

I don't recall exactly how long it took them to open, but I believe it was about six months or so. Perhaps they were ensuring they would be the place of dreams and inspiration for vidiots everywhere. More than likely, there was some problem with the electrical specifications of the space, or maybe Time Out just didn't have all the games they needed yet. Whatever the deal was, when it finally opened, it was a sight to behold.

It was dark inside. Dimly lit, actually. It was quite unlike today's mall arcades, which are so boisterous with lighting that all the video screens are blinded in disruptive glares. No, this place made its OWN light... rectangles of decorative marquees, bright and colorful monitors with bouncing and flying images, and little red "25 cents" panels on the coin doors, acting as tiny little beacons to my eager eyes.

Neon lights danced near the ceiling and several television monitors extended down, playing the latest video from Blondie or Devo. An "archway" of sorts was part of the main entrance. Actually, it was based on the interior of the "O" in the Time Out logo; a gradient of red to orange that made it appear as if you were setting foot into another world. Which, of course, you were. It was a fantastic world where you could do anything and be anything, and just one more quarter could make you the reigning champion over whatever you wished.

In case you chose not to enter via the "O," there was a smaller entrance to the left, created by a curved wall that stretched from floor to roof. This wall created a "corridor" of games that wrapped around and back into the main body of the arcade behind the "O" archway.

I recall looking over on the right most wall, as a sea of people crowded around the Pac-Mans. Two Pacs and four Ms.Pacs emitted a chorus of dot gobbling to flood the ears. Towards the back was a cluster of "alien" games such as Galaxian, Galaga, Phoenix, and Astro Blaster. To the untrained eye they are all the same game, but to a youthful vidiot, they're WORLDS apart. "Yankee Doodle" blares from the other wall. A Frogger on full volume and a player oblivious to the sound are close by. A Berzerk taunts a teenager..."CHICKEN! FIGHT LIKE A ROBOT!!!" The place was just an overload for the senses: The nasty guttural intro sound to Defender; The Jumpman's squeaky sneakers in Donkey Kong (We weren't to learn his first name of Mario until D.K. Jr.); the ultra-cool cockpit cabinet of Star Fire beckoning players to get comfy before getting blasted; the simultaneous shrinking and growing helix of Qix; the intimidating cabinet art of Centipede and Tempest (those bugs and monsters looked FIERCE!); the militaristic precision of those deadly copters in Armor Attack; and the perfect crystal clear vectors projected onto the beautiful 3-D backlit space scape of Asteroids Deluxe (I wonder how many kids were inspired to buy blacklights because of that game).

As I walked back into this beloved Mecca recently, I grew sad. Gone was the "O" archway. Gone were the neon stripes. Gone was that cool second entrance. Ripped out. Obliterated. You couldn't even look at the ceiling or floor to see where it HAD been. It was brightly colored now too. Obnoxious. And way too many redemption style games for my money. (Oooohhh, can I PLEASE play Whack-A-Mole for 24 hours straight to earn enough tickets for the dinky cassette player??) And classic games? FORGET IT! I think the oldest game they had was from 1997. My heart sank.

As I looked around at all the Virtua Fighting, Virtua Car Racing, Virtua Skiing, Virtua Dogs Playing Poker bull-s…, my eyes glazed as I drifted back in time and remembered all the great games I played there for the first time: Sit down Star Wars... (They sure don't make them like that anymore!); Kangaroo... (Time to PUNCH THE MONKEY!!!!); Dragon's Lair...(back when they put another monitor on top of the cabinet so the passersby could watch); a Track & Field cocktail... (I still have blisters from hitting those damn buttons so hard!); Zaxxon... (I'd die instantly, but those few seconds of pseudo-3D bliss were SPECTACULAR!). So many games! I also recalled around 1982, when the mall sponsored a contest to win an Asteroids machine (I presume it was the one from the arcade). A "stage" was set up in the center of the mall, and Ms.Pac-Man, Pole Position, and Stargate were on the stage. You had to pay an entry fee, and were then given one credit on each of the three games. After you played each one once, your scores were combined, and the contestant with the highest combined score took home the Asteroids. I imagine there had to have been a time limit, otherwise a good game of Ms. Pac-Man could have lasted several hours!

Finally, I remember my grandfather taking me there around '85, and I saw a Dig Dug machine facing the back with somebody working on it. It turned out to be a young female technician, busily converting the Dig Dug into Konami's Super Basketball. My Grandfather and I talked to her for a little while about this new process of converting old games. I remember thinking that this explained the oddball games I had seen from time to time like Ms.Pac-Man in a Pac-Man cabinet. Little did I know how many great classics would be lost.

Needless to say, I played nothing. I left quickly, as to better preserve my memories of the way it should have stayed. As I walked back out, I tried to convey to Seleen the wonderment I experienced as a kid visiting the arcade in its heyday and how it saddened me to see it in its current state. She empathized, but I'm not sure she could ever fully understand. As she put her hand on my shoulder and we walked away, I swear I heard the painful Pac-Man death whimper in the air.
sniff sniff excuse me...

HONEY, I SLEPT WITH Ms. Pac-Man

(Or, For the Love of the Game)

By Earl Green

Like many classic gamers, I wasn't just into *playing* the games; I was into how they worked, how they "thought" and made their decisions. I originally lusted after my first computer (a gleaming, 64K, Apple II-compatible, one-ton - or so it seemed when I was merely eleven years old - Franklin ACE 1000) primarily so I could learn how to program my own games.

It didn't quite work out that way, but video games did have a seismic effect on my life. In fact, I credit my whole career track to the multitude of interests spawned by two things: the original Star Wars and Pac-Man. Somehow, my interest in both of these things led to a fascination with computers, graphics, photography, writing...and the end result is me today, a mildly successful (but ever teetering on the edge of being completely broke) TV promotions producer.

It's easy to see the role these things have played in my life. Now how do I explain this to the woman I'm marrying in just under six months?

I think she was okay with my eBay activities back when I was finishing off my collection of old Star Wars toys (another hobby of mine). She raised an eyebrow, but still seemed happy for me, when I completed my collection of Coleco tabletop mini-arcade games. But when I started collecting marquees that once graced real live arcade games, the question finally came. Why? Why are you doing this? Are you slowly working your way toward having your own full-size, stand-up Frogger machine in the corner? I assured her that this was a silly question, because I'd much rather have a sit-down cocktail table version of Frogger due to the limited space in our apartment. Somehow, I don't think this attempt at joking about it helped my case. Why *am* I doing this?

For the love of the games. And this is incredibly hard to explain to someone who didn't thrill to the adrenaline rush that occurred in the seconds between dropping a quarter into the slot and pressing the "player one" start button in an arcade. It seems incredibly silly to her. Probably - though she hasn't put it quite so bluntly - childish.

For the record, I am working on a little decorating project with all these marquees. I'm working on framing and lighting them; setting them aglow once more. These items won't, however, be on display in the living room or the master bedroom. In fact, I'm anticipating that they'll probably languish, framed nicely and ready to hang, in storage until we buy our own house and there's room for me to display all my trinkets that bring me so much nostalgia and comfort.

But that's still hard to explain. Hey, I'd jump at the chance to pick up a full-size working Tron game for the right price, but the main point is that I'm really not actively looking to get a whole machine. We really don't have the room for it. It would have to fall into my lap very fortuitously for me to even consider it. I *am* aware that this isn't my old apartment in Green Bay, where the second floor served not only as the bedroom, but as Earl's museum of Coleco games, Star Wars figures, etc. I am keenly aware that I will soon be sharing close quarters with someone I care deeply for, and the last thing I want to do is make her uncomfortable, or make her unhappy with her surroundings.

The only explanation I can offer her is that this stuff is important to me on a very primal level. It reminds me of summer days spent with my older brother in Games R Us on the corner of Rogers Avenue and Waldron Road. We'd pop quarters into almost every machine for a few hours and, curiously enough, almost always listen to his well-worn cassette of The Police's "Zenyatta Mondatta" album on the drive home. Those were the good times. When the bad times hit later, sometimes the games and the computers and the other hobbies were all I had to cling to. And the bad times were *bad.* Members of my family have often wondered how I managed to sidestep bad influences such as drugs, drinking, and so on, like walking between the dark raindrops of teenage angst. The truth is, I had better things to do with my time. I used other escape mechanisms - and they were displayed in 16 colors on a TV or monitor. I had to keep my wits about me and my reflexes sharp, because it's hard enough to stay alive in the same space with Sinistar *without* chemical interference. It's just possible that all this pixilated silliness kept me alive and made it possible for us to meet each other in the first place.

And in the end, it *is* just a hobby. I know we're all reading this magazine because we love these old games...but the truth is, I'd much rather spend time with my beloved than play another round of Dig Dug. She'll probably never be into these games as much as I am. (Believe me, I do keep trying.) One of these days when we have kids, I'd be more than happy to turn them on to the joys of these simple, addictive old games. (I think I'd much rather introduce a child in his single digits to Pac-Man than to Battle Arena Toshinden.)

I'd like my classic game fixation to be a family affair...but I know it probably won't happen. I only ask my dearest one, and the significant others of the readership of CGM, to understand that this stuff does mean something to each and every one of us. Be patient with the classic gamer. He may indeed be clinging fast to a fragment of his youth...but it's such a relatively harmless pursuit compared to hunting, hot-rodding, or trying to convince his body that it can still endure full-contact sports while pushing thirty years of age.

Video games, both in my youth and now, are proof that there are worse things I could be doing with my time. So, I gladly celebrate them and share them with others in the hopes of perpetuating something that future generations might choose over the bad influences that so often overwhelm young people. With all the controversy surrounding video game violence, I could hardly do worse than introduce someone to Pengo.

Maybe I'll see if I can get this woman - the one I'm marrying in just under six months - to play a round or two with me.

Earl Green, editor-in-chief/webmaster,
http://www.theLogBook.com

Classic Advertisement

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UP TO NOW, YOU'VE HAD IT EASY.

1982

The recent death of Larry Linville, Frank Burns on TV's 'MASH,' saddened me. I'm sure many of us have fond memories laughing at ol' Ferret Face's antics on the long-running sitcom. However, Larry Linville actually has classic game-related memories for me. You see, his character figured prominently in my design of MASH II for the Atari 2600.

Larry Linville

While everyone has speculated at one time or another on the existence of a MASH II prototype game, I can tell you a bit about what MAY have been. When the original MASH cart by 20th Century Fox came out, it was all I wanted for my 14th birthday. I was a HUGE Atari and MASH fan at the time. I thought that any game that combined my two favorite time-killers was a great idea. (Plus, the cart came complete with a free T-shirt, so I had to have it.) Sure enough, it was one of the gifts I got.

After spending many hours wearing my t-shirt ("Property of the MASH 4077th"), rescuing "wounded," and operating on them in the OR, I decided to take a break and rummage through the miscellaneous paperwork that was crammed in the game box. Besides the instructions and warranty cards was an entry form for a contest.

"In 50 words or less, describe the gameplay for a future MASH game of your own design!"

The winning entry would have his or her creation made into an actual released game and the designer would get, not only the notoriety, but a game designer's contract with 20th Century Fox! Second place winners (10 of them I think) would win a free 20th Century Fox game and third place winners would get a MASH t-shirt. I raced to my room and began to fill out the form.

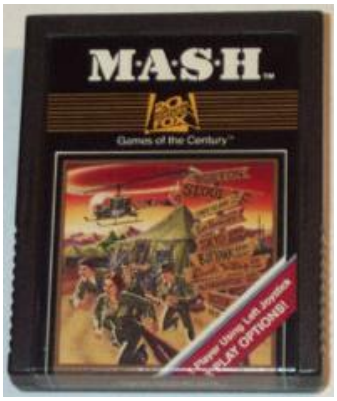
It took three days of writing on scratch paper before I had my idea down to 50 words or less. I based my concept on the episode "5 O'Clock Charlie" which featured a North Korean pilot with poor eyesight trying to bomb the camp ammo dump. Frank had requisitioned a Howitzer to shoot Charlie out of the sky. Meanwhile, Hawkeye and Trapper reasoned that, if Charlie hit the dump, Charlie would fly off to "terrorize" more targets.

M*A*S*H II Concept Screen

Recently, I actually found that scrap paper that had my contest entry. Here's what I envisioned:

"Hawkeye and Trapper are trying to help 5 O'Clock Charlie bomb the nearby ammo dump! Watch for Frank Burns! He's trying to shoot Charlie out of the sky! The Swamp-Boys move a target that Charlie's trying to hit. If they can get Charlie to bomb the dump, you score!"

Many weeks later, I opened the mailbox and found a parcel from 20th Century Fox games. Inside was a letter telling me my idea had won a second place prize, which was Turmoil. I was thrilled that someone at a Big Time Game Company thought my game idea didn't suck.



Since no description of MASH II has ever surfaced, my game idea may be all that exists of a recognized game concept for the game sequel. In a way, I'd like to think that my 14-year-old ramblings on a scrap piece of paper is all that remains of the ever-elusive MASH II 2600 cart.

Original M*A*S*H

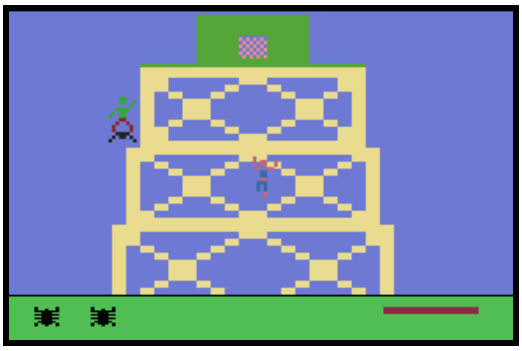
CGM

Spider-Man™ (...AND HIS NOT SO AMAZING VIDEOGAMES)

By Patrick Wong

Throughout history, various mysteries have remained unsolved: The Riddle of The Sphinx, The Bermuda Triangle, The Missing Link, and even Bigfoot. But perhaps one of the most puzzling of all is the lack of a great Spider-Man video game.

Not since Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny have we seen a character as popular as Spider-Man. As one of the most enduring characters to span all media, Spider-Man has been entertaining children and adults of all ages for over 37 years.



Spider-Man (Atari 2600)

From his humble beginnings as a feature character in the last issue of "Amazing Fantasy" to his new multi-movie deal with Sony, Spider-Man seems to have it all: comic books, toys, TV shows, video games, movie deals, his own Macy's Thanksgiving Day balloon, legions of fans, and a beautiful red headed wife named Mary Jane Parker. He's not a fad like Pokémon or a character past its prime like Betty Boop. With millions reading his comic books and millions more watching his FoxKids television shows, it's unclear why Spidey has yet to extend his webbings to the digital gaming world.

Spider-Man has certainly left his webbings everywhere else. With thousands of Marvel licensed products, Spider-Man has proven himself to be a valuable commodity; anything featuring his mask could potentially mean millions of dollars in revenue. So, why not a hit videogame? Perhaps we should start at the beginning.

WEB LINES

Like a spider dangling helplessly on his lone web line whenever the wind blows, so too was Spider-Man when Spidey's creator, Stan Lee, approached his Marvel Comics publisher with the idea of making a teenager the star of his own comic. It was a different time in the comic book days of the 60's, when kids & teenagers were mostly seen as sidekicks (probably due in part to a certain Dynamic Duo who shall remain nameless). The Spider-Man approach was revolutionary because unlike comic book heroes at the time, this hero would deal with everyday problems of life. Heroes weren't supposed to have everyday problems, so Marvel Comics axed the idea of giving this "Super-Hero with everyday problems" his own series. Lee then "sneaked" Spider-Man into the final issue of "Amazing Fantasy" during the summer of '62.

What made Spider-Man so popular for over 37 years instead of burning out like almost every rising star? What made millions of readers feel as if they could relate to or share a kindred spirit with Spider-Man? Perhaps it's his story of a hard luck kid who never got to know his parents and was raised by his loving Uncle Ben and Aunt May.

While growing up, Peter Parker was a nerd, bullied by a jock who treated him as if he was the lowest worm on Earth. He had bad hair, incredible bad luck with girls, and was cursed with bad eyesight, which was accented by thick glasses. Hey, that could have been any one of us.

Amazing Fantasy #15

While attending a science exhibit, good fortune (if you could call it that) bit him in the form of a radioactive spider. A startled Peter Parker was blessed (again, if you could call it that) with the super powers of a radioactive spider and for the first time in his life, he felt confident that he could succeed in anything. He felt he could be someone, and like anyone else given a once in a lifetime opportunity, Peter Parker took advantage of his new-found super powers by designing a red and blue costume with intricate web lines of a spider and tried to cash in on it with a stage show.

We all know that Lady Luck never stays long with someone like Peter, though. One night after another dazzling performance by Spider-Man, a burglar who had just robbed the show's box office ran past him. When the guard asked for assistance, Spider-Man didn't want to be bothered. Why should he? He was just your larger than life celebrity, too caught up in his own buzz to care about something as meager as a petty robbery.

On his way home a few nights later, after another business-as-usual night in show business, Peter caught sight of police cars outside his home and knew something was wrong. When he investigated, an officer told him that a burglar had broken into his home and, in the process, killed his Uncle Ben. An outraged Peter Parker donned his celebrity costume in pursuit of the killer.

The murderer fled into an abandoned warehouse. The place was dark and the burglar thought he could hold off police for the night and then make his escape (all villains believe an abandoned warehouse can hold anybody off for the night). Soon, a red light hit him. Maybe, he thought, it was the police lights. When he looked up, however, he saw an enormous Spider crawl down towards him. The Wall Crawler took him out with a punch.

When Spidey unmasked his foe, he was shocked to discover that the murderer was the same thief he saw robbing the box office a few nights earlier. Guiltily, he realized he could've prevented his Uncle's death! It was then he understood that "With Great Power comes Great Responsibility." All this because Peter had tried to take advantage of some-

thing that God, nature, or just an accident had given him. Just once, he wanted to be selfish and use his new gifts for personal gain. What was wrong with that? Peter never got a break in life; not from birth, not from childhood, and not from luck. He just wanted to be somebody. The rest is history.

Maximum Carnage (Genesis)

Spider-Man quickly took off with his own comic book series, and during the height of his comic book popularity in the early to mid 90's, Spidey fans were able to follow his adventures in over 5 titles including: The Amazing Spider-Man, The Spectacular Spider-Man, The Web of Spider-Man, SPIDER-MAN, and The Sensational Spider-Man.

TV shows would naturally follow. His comic book spun off into a few short lived TV shows including an animated series in the 60's, a live action in the 70's, and two animated series in the 80's. While they were all fun to watch, none of them captured the true essence of Peter Parker and Spider-Man. One would feature his Spider-Instincts but lack his personality. One may feature some of his quick wit but little of his athletic skills. One animated series regularly featured our friendly neighborhood Spider-Man swinging from web lines seemingly attached to clouds! While none of them contributed to television history, they did prove Spider-Man's staying power over two decades and up to today (thanks to reruns and video tapes).

More licensing followed. Everything from Spider-Man candy, Halloween costumes, breakfast cereals, watches, and even shampoos were sold at one time or another. A few years ago, web shooters were finally produced after over thirty years of Spidey fans wondering why no one had bothered to come up with such a toy (although it was probably over fears that Spidey fans would try to web swing off buildings for real - like the kids who thought they could fly like the Man of Steel simply by wrapping blankets around their necks).

Hypothetically it's possible for little Spidey fans to start the day waking up in his or her Spider-Man pajamas after having slept the night on his or her Spider-Man bed sheets and blankets. Enjoy breakfast with Spider-Man cereal while watching Spider-Man on television and then go to school with a Spider-Man backpack (Spider-Man pencils, pens, and notebooks inside, of course) and a Spidey jacket to go along with his or her clothing (everything from t-shirts to sneakers; Spidey belt is optional). If it's the weekend, perhaps the children would like to play tennis; with what else? A Spider-Man tennis racket. If you can eat it, wear it, or play it, chances are there's something with Spidey's likeness on it.

All the TV shows and commercial products help kids play out their dreams of being a web slinging super-hero. Although all of them rely on the imagination of children to play out the battles and storylines, none offer the chance to fully play out their fantasy. One doesn't actually do battle with any of Spider-Man's worst villains, or swing across Manhattan buildings on a web line, or save Mary Jane in the nick of time (all the while in a real time environment where split second decisions will decide whether Spidey is a hero or a zero). But a new technology would slowly change that…

Enter The Amazing Spider-Man

The Green Goblin is holding New York City's skyscrapers hostage! His thugs are over-running the buildings and to make matters worse, the Goblin has planted a Super-Bomb at the top of every building. Just to make it tough for you, he has his pumpkin bombs scattered along the high rises as well. Time is running out and your Spider-Sense is buzzing.

Spider fans finally got a chance to see if they could fill Spidey's shoes in Parker Brothers' "Spider-Man" for the Atari 2600. The game has Spidey race against time trying to reach a Super-Bomb before it blows up one of New York's many towering buildings. If successful, his reward will be another skyscraper to save. A hero's job is never done in New York.

The game features simple graphics with a red and blue stick figure Spider-Man shooting a straight black line off the top of his head to a building. He then swings upwards or sideways along the blocky building, trying to avoid the thugs (also blocky stick figures who appear in windows) who are trying to cut Spidey's webbing and cause him to fall to his death (SPLAT!). If Spidey swings over the thugs, he'll capture them and be rewarded with extra web fluid.

As you progress up the building, you'll encounter an unfinished portion of the edifice where you need to web-sling onto steel beams and avoid the pumpkin bombs the Green Goblin has laid in your path. If time permits, you can gain more time, points and web fluid by touching and defusing the bombs before they explode. If you time it wrong and touch the bomb as it explodes, the blast will knock Spider-Man off his web line or his hold on the wall and Spidey will begin his deadly descent. If his energy (the web meter at the bottom of the screen gauges energy level) is low, however, the blast will definitely end his adventure. If the bombs explode without Spider-Man touching them, they'll harmlessly disappear, miraculously leaving the high beams unscathed.

Players may feel disappointed (and even disbelief) that the game doesn't allow Spider-Man to climb up walls without first shooting a webline. Pumpkin bombs are also a disappointment because they never really pose a threat if our hero scales up either the far right or far left sides of the building.

None of the previous letdowns will prepare you for your encounter with the Green Goblin; a stick figured green and purple character who does nothing more than glide back and forth a few inches below the Super-Bomb. Since there isn't any danger of the Goblin tossing pumpkin bombs at you, simply wait until he passes, swing up and

touch the Super-Bomb - that's all there is to it. Of course, like all villains in an Atari game, he glides across faster as you defeat each level. How else is the Goblin supposed to beat you when there isn't enough RAM to do anything else?

Given a chance (and a little imagination), the game can actually be quite challenging and fun. You'll come to the same conclusion that going up the sides of the building is the fastest way to win. At that point the game basically becomes a race as you try to beat the bombs from exploding. The television commercial has Spidey asking the viewer, "Is this more action than even Spider-Man can handle?" We think not.

Spider-Man (Questprobe)

The Spider's Games

With the arrival of more powerful 8-bit and 16-bit systems, software developers had the opportunity to create Spider-Man games that were more sophisticated than the Atari version. Spider-Man would make numerous appearances (both starring and cameos) on the Nintendo, Game Boy, Super Nintendo, and Sega Genesis during the late 80's and 90's.

Titles included Acclaim's Maximum Carnage and Separation Anxiety; LJN's Return of the Sinister Six, Invasion of the Spider Slayers (The Amazing Spider-Man 3), and Spider-Man/X-Men in Arcade's Revenge; Rare's Amazing Spider-Man 1 and 2; and Sega's Spider-Man, Spider-Man vs. The Kingpin, and Spider-Man: Web of Fire. Unfortunately, all of them would fall short of being the great Spider-Man video game fans had been waiting for. They would all suffer from the chronic chore of having to collect web fluids and power enhancements at various stages of the game. The video games also forced Spider-Man to battle the same thugs until he reached the boss at the end of the level. None of them would offer a real story or plot to challenge the game player (most of the games were loosely based on various mini-series that were featured in the comic books).

Spidey would make a few arcade appearances as well. Hits like Capcom's Marvel Super Heroes, Marvel Super Heroes vs. Street Fighter, and Marvel vs. Capcom along with Sega's Spider-Man would help establish Spider-Man's presence on both video gaming venues (arcade and home). While all of them feature our hero fighting Super Villains and fellow Super-Heroes, none of the arcade games fully captured the essence of Spider-Man. They all ended up being "just another fighter game," lacking any real story, plots, or anything else. They were, however, all fun to play and were all arcade hits.

Sega's **Spider-Man vs. The Kingpin** for the Sega CD would probably be the best title among the 8-bit and 16-bit Spidey titles. In it, Spider-Man must save New York from a Super Bomb (set to detonate in 24 hours), which the Kingpin (along with Doctor Octopus, Electro, Hobgoblin, Mysterio, The Lizard, The Vulture, and Venom) has set up in a scheme to frame Spider-Man and blow up New York. In addition, a bounty has been put up by the wealthy philanthropist Wilson Fisk (a.k.a The Kingpin) to help turn the citizens and police of New York against our friendly neighborhood Spider-Man. To make matters worse, Mary Jane has been kidnapped (revealed later in the game) and her life is at stake.

Spider-Man (Genesis)

The game is a multimedia treat for Spidey fans because not only can you play as everyone's favorite wall crawler, you get to watch an animated cartoon throughout the game (unlike most cases of playing cartridge games, when one would only see standard picture cut scenes). Unfortunately, the cartoons are a bit campy, resembling the Spider-Man animated show of the 60's. His dialogue is straight out of the corny Super-Heroes (I'm only here to serve the public, Madam!) handbook, which all Super-Heroes had to sound like at one time or another. In addition to the cartoon, there's even a rock soundtrack in the game with the lead track being performed by Eric Martin (90's rock group, *Mr. Big).*

Sega tries desperately to capture the many aspects of Spider-Man's life, from Mary Jane's cuddles & kisses when she's with her husband; to Spider-Man saving an old lady from a purse snatcher; to battling all of Spider-Man's most ruthless villains, all in one game. While some of the other titles were based on a comic book mini-series, this title is an original story (as original as it can get for a video game title, which isn't really saying much). This is also its downfall because the writers try too hard to find a way to put all of Spidey's worst villains in the game and fail to make it work. The story doesn't give a lot of insight into why the Kingpin would try to blow up New York since he lives in the city, or why anyone would try the old, "Let's frame Spider-Man!" scheme that so many villains have tried and failed in the past.

The game also tries to be unique by having Spider-Man dispose of some of the villains in much the same way as he would in the comic books. For example, to beat Venom, Spidey would have to lure the symbiotic creature through the streets and into a church where he would have to set off church bells to immobilize Venom. Unfortunately, at the end of the game, Spider-Man would have to face Venom again, but this time he could just beat him up without any help from church bells or sonic guns. This only adds to the conclusion that the story was rushed because the designers didn't spend a lot of time trying to help the gamer make sense of the game's inconsistencies.

To further add to the confusion, Spider-Man is forced to find and collect five keys from various Super-Villains which will be needed to defuse the bomb (when was the last time someone needed keys to defuse a bomb?). Of course, since there are more villains than keys, some of the villains (once beaten) will simply offer clues on where to find the other keys. Another big setback is that the game mentions various New York landmarks such as Coney Island, yet prevents the player from traveling to that location.

On a more positive note, the graphics in Spider-Man vs. Kingpin are done

quite nicely. Everything from the skyscrapers to the various mazes and backdrops are drawn with nice detail. Spider-Man is drawn with close attention to how his body acrobatically bends into various crouches and positions. Spidey has plenty of moves and various ways of using his webbing to help beat an opponent. One nice move that Spidey can perform, unlike the other titles (with the exception of Maximum Carnage), is his ability to climb up the front of New York's buildings. Spidey can choose to explore rooftops and stop to enjoy the horizon of the city at various locations in the game.

Spider-Man vs. The Kingpin also offers alternate endings: Mary Jane may live or die. In the final battle between Spider-Man and Kingpin, Mary Jane can be seen slowly being lowered into a large vat of deadly acid. Since the game features a happy ending or a sad ending, it's up to the player's fast hand-eye coordination to decide which one he or she will see.

While the game is fun at times, the poor story and forced sequences severely hamper this Spidey title from scoring high marks. There isn't enough variety of henchmen in this game, and there are too many policemen all over the city (anyone living in New York would understand why seeing so many policemen in one city block just isn't realistic). A great Spider-Man game should move at a slower pace. It should offer more plotlines and chances for Spider-Man to secretly observe the villains rather than forcing him to jump head first into the action and fighting.

Spider-Man (PlayStation)

All Spider-Man games lack one important ability which makes Spider-Man special: his Spider-Sense. His Spider-Sense should be included to warn him any time danger is near. So often in Spider-Man games, the Spider-Sense only tingles when he's about to battle the bosses. It would be nice to have a system to warn when the goons and ghouls are approaching. It would also add a new dimension to the game: Strategy. Spider-Man would be able to hide in areas around the screen where the player would know he or she is safe from danger because his Spider-Sense isn't tingling. This would also allow him to spy on the various people in Parker's life from Harry Osborn to J. Jonah Jameson.

Web Firings

By the mid-90's, Sega would try once more to deliver a great Spider-Man game. This time he would appear on Sega's 32-bit system attachment: The 32X. **Spider-Man: Web of Fire** had been hyped since the introduction of the 32X but would take over a year to hit store shelves. The ads showed a cool graphic of Spider-Man swinging in mid-air, surrounded by a backdrop of New York City skyscrapers on fire, and a giant electrical plasma grid shrouding the city's skyline. Spidey fans were eagerly anticipating Spidey's leap into the 32-bit world. This title would also happen to be the last game released for the 32X before the system's demise.

The game features a huge fatal problem because it pits Spider-Man against one of the least popular villains, the military group HYDRA. HYDRA hasn't made many appearances in any of the Spider-Man comics in a long while, leading Spidey fans to wonder why Sega would feature them in a video game. Hydra rarely registers in Spidey fans' minds because there are so many more villains that have a direct and profound influence in Spider-Man's life. It would seem natural for a Spider-Man game to pit our hero against the likes of Venom or the Green Goblin. HYDRA is more of a job for the Fantastic Four, Nick Fury, or The Avengers.

The game lacked in every area that a great Spider-Man game would need: characters, depth, plotlines, and story. Essentially, Web of Fire is a 2-D side scroller where Spider-Man is nothing more than a puppet, surrounded by lackluster villains and a superficial plot: HYDRA has shrouded New York City in a Web of Fire that's crumbling buildings and frying civilians, and it's up to Spider-Man to stop them.

Unlike other Spidey games where there's at least a comic book-like story for the player to follow between stages, Web of Fire only displays headlines from the Daily Bugle as a way of telling the story. The game designers do absolutely nothing to explain how the Web of Fire has shrouded New York.

The graphics are the only strong point to this title. The rich background of the city, from its skyscrapers to the George Washington Bridge, are quite pleasing to the eye. Spider-Man has a variety of action moves from his basic web swing to jab punches and running kicks, although at times his movements seem awkward and unnatural. The graphic designers didn't seem to put a lot of thought into animation.

Some of the villains such as Dragonman, Dreadnoughts, and Super-Adaptoid are nicely done. Obstacles like Probes, Rocket Launchers, Spheres, and Fish (yes, there's actually a fish-like flying probe) range from unimaginative to ridiculous. Once again the game's villains suffer from the same repetitive fighting boredom that all Spider-Man games would have: battling the same henchmen over and over again till you reach the level's boss.

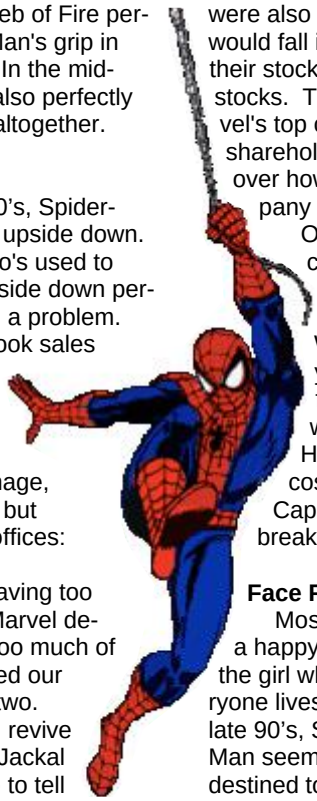
The Daredevil makes a guest appearance in this game as a back-up for Spidey whenever he gets into a sticky situation. Unfortunately, to get Daredevil's help, you have to find and collect special Daredevil icons in order to summon him. There are also first aid packs and web fluid icons, which must be found and collected if you're to finish the level. Even on the easiest level, you'll probably find yourself running short on web fluid and health because there are too many cheap hits Spidey is forced to take from HYDRA agents and computer attack droids.

Spider-Man (PlayStation)

It seems ironic, but Web of Fire perfectly describes Spider-Man's grip in the video gaming world. In the mid-90's, Web of Fire would also perfectly describe Spidey's world altogether.

Trial & Trying Times

For most of the mid 90's, Spider-Man's world would seem upside down. Even for Spider-Man, who's used to seeing things from an upside down perspective, this would pose a problem. His popularity in comic book sales plummeted when Spidey fans unofficially boycotted his series. The culprit this time wouldn't be Venom, Carnage, or any other super-villain but Spidey's own corporate offices: Marvel Comics.



You've heard about having too much of a good thing? Marvel decided that there's never too much of a good thing and multiplied our favorite Wall Crawler by two.

The clone saga would revive the villain known as The Jackal (Professor Miles Warren) to tell a complex story. The Jackal once created a clone of Peter Parker (a clone Spider-Man would seemingly have defeated years ago), which would somehow end up being the REAL Peter Parker in a saga full of confusing plots and equally confusing explanations. In the end, the clone (being passed as the real Peter Parker) would call himself Ben Reilly (a combination of Uncle Ben's first name and Aunt May's maiden name), bleach his hair blond, and don a new costume with a new name: The Scarlet Spider. In a matter of weeks, Spidey fans would abandon the new Spider-Man series in disgust and the comic book industry would enter a great depression

To be fair, the comic book industry was already heading for a depression. Gimmicks like hologram covers, multiple covers, and high prices would open the eyes of comic book readers to the evils of corporate greed. The combination of comic book prices soaring past two dollars, and the multiple titles a reader had to purchase to follow the story each month would end up greatly draining Spidey fans' pockets. Some comic book readers would end up having to choose between buying Spidey titles or paying bills.

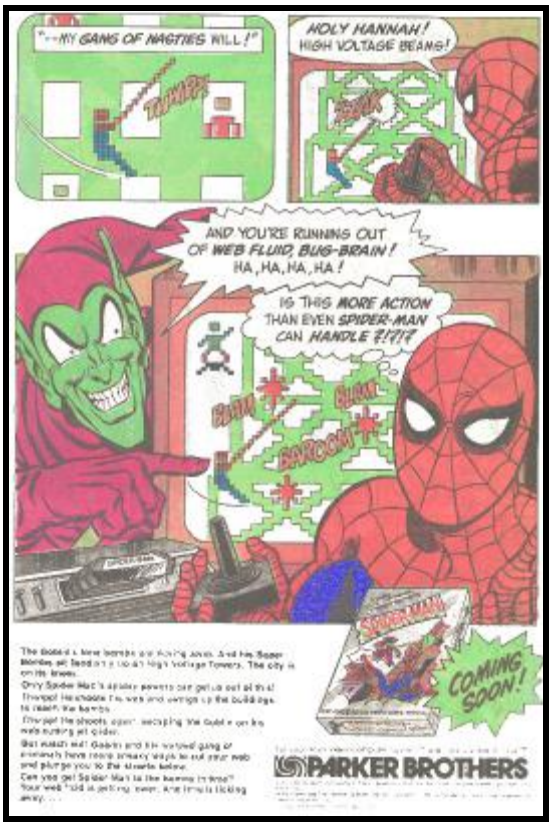
While Spider-Man's fans may not have directly caused the crash, the sheer number of Spidey fans dropping support for the comics was certainly a contributing factor.

At the same time, Marvel's other holdings were in trouble. The company's division of sports trading cards were also losing profits, and Marvel would fall into bankruptcy hearings with their stocks falling to the level of penny stocks. To make matters worse, Marvel's top controlling party and Marvel's shareholders would argue in court over how to keep the legendary company afloat.

On top of that, Spidey was in a court battle of his own. Various Hollywood movie studios would lay claim to the Wall Crawler's unwritten (and yet to be produced) movie feature. Poor Spider-Man would have to wait for his Hollywood star while other costumed heroes like the Caped Crusader would go on to break box office records.

Face Front True Believer!

Most comic books usually have a happy ending. The hero would get the girl while saving the day and everyone lives happily ever after. By the late 90's, Spider-Man seemed destined to have his day in the sun.


MY GANG OF NASTIES WILL!"
HOLY HANNAH! HIGH VOLTAGE BEAMS!
AND YOU'RE RUNNING OUT OF WEB FLUID, BUG-BRAIN! HA, HA, HA, HA!
IS THIS MORE ACTION THAN EVEN SPIDER-MAN CAN HANDLE ?!?!?
COMING SOON!
PARKER BROTHERS

For over four seasons (1994-97), Fox kids would feature the first successful adaptation of Spider-Man for the small screen. Like the video games, the television show would borrow its stories from the comic books and do so with amazing success. Spider-Man would be the same hero his fans know and love: razor sharp wit, use of wise-cracks during battles, and tackling his "everyday" problems as Peter Parker. The show would feature only minor script changes, which every TV show has to make for a television cross-over to be successful, and Spidey's rock theme would be written and performed by Aerosmith's Joe Perry. The show would constantly place number one in the ratings for most of its run.

In the series finale episode, entitled, "Spider Wars: Farewell Spider-Man," Spider-Man would poke fun at the whole clone situation by saying, "This is starting to sound like a bad comic book plot!" There wasn't a Spidey fan around who wasn't laughing and applauding when he said that.

His movie situation would clear up too with Sony pictures winning the rights to a big screen adaptation of Spider-Man (the battle over TV rights are still in the courts between Sony and Viacom). The Spidey movie is expected to have a budget of over two hundred million dollars and feature an A list actor (names rumored to play Spider-Man are *Titanic's* Leonardo Di-Caprio and *The Mask's* Jim Carrey).

During this time, Marvel Comics would emerge from bankruptcy and acquire toy manufacturer, Toy Biz Incorporated. The stock recovered and for the first time in years, it looks as if Spidey won't be going bankrupt but instead may end up stronger than ever.

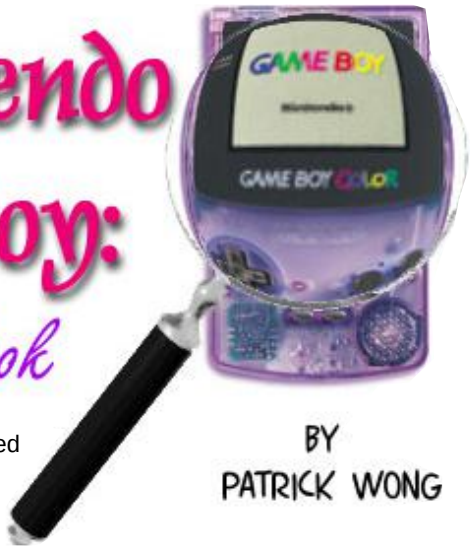
So, what about that great Spider-Man video game? Activision, along with Neversoft, is currently working on the first 3-D Spidey game for the Nintendo 64 and Sony PlayStation. The promo screenshots at last year's E3 (covered in the premiere issue of Classic Gamer Magazine) look amazing and the game promises to be the Spider-Man game everyone has been waiting for.

Perhaps the real reason for the lack of a great Spider-Man videogame can be found by looking at Spidey himself. His complexity seems too much for the great game systems of yesterday, and it's only with today's game systems that there's finally a technology that can support all the characteristics and nuances that's demanded from our hero.

As Stan Lee would say, "Hang on to your seat True Believer!"

CGM

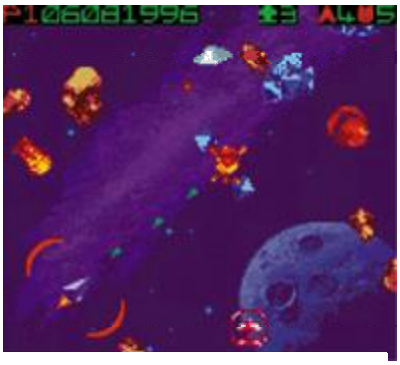
The Nintendo Game Boy: A Closer Look



BY PATRICK WONG

With Nintendo's announcement of their upcoming Game Boy Advanced, The Game Boy finally begins her journey into the sunset. Before historians and game players start writing their differing opinions about the Game Boy's place in our storied industry's history, a strong case can be made for the Game Boy being the greatest system in videogaming history.

Journey back to the video game world of 1989; the forefront of the 16-bit frontier. The time-tested Nintendo Entertainment System ruled the scene over both the Sega Master System and the Atari 7800 ProSystem. The legendary Atari 2600 was taking her final bow after a long life battling numerous competitors from Intellivision, Colecovision, and even Atari's own 5200. The 2600, whose origins began at the birth of the video game era, was attempting a comeback, complete with a facelift and new games. The Sega Genesis had just arrived on our shores, and Nintendo's Super Nintendo, NEC's Turbographx 16, and Atari's Lynx were on the horizon. The Atari Lynx and NEC Turbographx 16 (handheld model) are very important factors in this tale because not only were consoles going 16-bit, Atari and NEC were hoping that handhelds would also be going 16-bit. Enter the Game Boy.



Asteroids - Game Boy Color

The Game Boy was Nintendo's follow up to their semi-popular "Game & Watch" toys of the 80's. The Game Boy was born with near crippling abilities. At her heart was an 8-bit processor, the Z80, which also happened to be the same processor utilized in IBM PCs during the 70's.

How about the graphics? The graphics were a surprise to everyone because they lacked something very basic to all videogames: color. It featured only four shades of gray. In the 80's, mainstream videogame players rarely had to encounter black & white videogames. The Game Boy's video display was composed of dot matrix graphics that were blurry when viewed on its tiny 2.6 inch screen. In fact, the Game Boy would have the smallest screen of all handheld systems.

What about the Game Boy's audio? It resembled more of a transistor radio than the Dolby surround or Hi-Fi stereo sounds our ears were growing accustomed to. It was hard to believe that with technology's advances, we were going to own a system that produced beeps instead of music. Clearly, the Game Boy's technical powers were a regressive move in the progressive world of videogames and technology.

Some players, upon noticing the gray shades and annoying beeps, assumed the Game Boy was a 4-bit system. Who could blame them? After all, in the late 80's and early 90's, color and sound were very mainstream in game systems.

As inferior as her insides were, her outside wasn't. The Game Boy was a sturdy system with a rough exterior; built like a brick. She didn't require much maintenance or space, never required anyone to share their TV, placed very little demand on electricity, and came with a renowned name: Nintendo. Also, for the most part, she was portable.

Being portable was her strongest point because critics and gamers were wondering how this seemingly backwards system could possibly compete against the superior game machines. With her specs, this system would almost certainly fail. Some were suggesting that the system should never have been made at all.

Frogger - Game Boy Color

Like the lesson learned from the timeless children's fable, "The Tortoise and the Hare," it's not always about starting out fast and building a big lead. Sometimes it's about going at your own pace. Technology moves at lightspeed, therefore a system's potential can't be measured by how many bits it has, if the games are 3-D, or even if it offers network gameplay and access to the worldwide web. A system's success is definitely a result of its games and how much fun they offer the gamer.

Since its introduction over a decade ago, the Game Boy has offered more games (and more fun) than anyone could've anticipated. The Game Boy's library features almost two thousand games and rivals the library of any other game system, from the Atari 2600 to the Sony PlayStation. How many game systems can boast that their library covers the great classic games from the 70's, 80's, and today's big arcade, N64, and PlayStation hits? From the old Atari classics like Asteroids, Centipede, Galaxian, Millipede (all released from Nintendo), Missile Command (separate versions from Nintendo and Majesco), and Yars' Revenge (Telegames); to today's next generation blockbusters like Acclaim's Mortal Kombat 1-4 and Turok 2: Seeds of Evil; to Activision's Pitfall: Beyond the Jungle; to Electronic Arts' Xena: Warrior Princess; to Midway's NFL Blitz, Ready 2

Rumble Boxing, and Rush 2: Extreme Racing USA, Game Boy has it covered. Or, how about the great fighting games like Capcom's Streetfighter 2 and Streetfighter Alpha, or SNK's Fatal Fury and Samurai Showdown? No one would've imagined seeing those titles on a Game Boy. Let's not forget Nintendo's own classics, from the original Super Mario Bros. and Donkey Kong remakes, to today's Super Mario Land series and Donkey Kong Land series. The Game Boy's library is of true heavyweight caliber and includes all gaming genres.

Nintendo's first offering for the Game Boy also turned out to be the most popular Game Boy title ever: Tetris. Tetris is the addictive game that sent gamers by the millions to buy a Game Boy, regardless of its shortcomings. Tetris can also take credit for being the reason the Game Boy is so popular among women. On any given day in New York City (and any other city, I'm sure), you'll more than likely see a few women playing their Game Boys on the trains and buses during their commute. Women's devotion to the Game Boy is undeniable.

In the early 90's, the Game Boy suffered from an identity crisis. The Game Boy was successful with all age groups and Nintendo was trying to broaden its advertising reach. At one time the system was being marketed to the "Yuppie" generation, offering software that organizes appointments and schedules! Titles like Infogenius' Personal Organizer, Travel Guide, and French or Spanish Language Translator were introduced but failed to win over the "Yuppie" crowd. Thankfully, Nintendo finally decided to stick with serious game players (Gen X).

During the Game Boy's first few years, Nintendo was having a tough time proving it was a serious game playing system. With mediocre titles like Super Mario Land and Konami's Castlevania, the system was drawing criticism from all corners and desperately needed stronger titles. While Super Mario Land was widely anticipated, the game failed to live up to the standard set from the Super Mario 2 and 3 games for the NES (the later Super Mario Land games for the Game Boy would be much better).

Things started turning around for the Game Boy when Nintendo finally released a sequel to the popular NES game, Metroid. Metroid 2: The Return of Samus made the cover and feature article on most of the popular video-game magazines. Feature articles and strategy guides, along with high approval ratings from both gamers and critics, finally proved that the Game Boy was more than just a system for converting scaled down versions of old NES games.

Around the same time, Konami released the Game Boy's first smash title from a third party developer: The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the Fall of the Footclan. The portable version would later be described as better than the original TMNT title for the NES because it featured the ninja fighting that the NES version failed to deliver (Konami would later release Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: The Arcade Game for the NES which turned out to be a huge smash later that following year).

Nintendo followed Metroid 2 with another hit, The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening. With the release of Zelda, the Game Boy had grown from an alternative system to a mainstream one, where it could be a game player's first system rather than their second or third.

By the mid 90's, the Game Boy was blessed with conversions of both Nintendo and third party developers' most successful series. From Nintendo's Super Mario Land series, Metroid 2: The Return of Samus, and The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening, to Konami's Contra series, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles series, Castlevania series, and THQ's John Madden Football series, the Game Boy had all the industry's biggest titles. Other big titles included Squaresoft's Final Fantasy Legend series; Nintendo's Killer Instinct and Kirby; Acclaim's Mortal Kombat Trilogy; NBA Jam series; and the WWF wrestling series.

With the Game Boy's success, Nintendo started seeing colors: red, green, yellow, black, and clear! When Nintendo started marketing the Game Boy in different colors, gamers everywhere began picking up

What's the number one selling game system in the world?

I'll give you one guess...

GBStation.com

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their own favorite color-cased Game Boy to match their personality or personal aura. It became fashionable for Game Boy owners to pick up a new color cased Game Boy and put away the bland original. Later in the 90's, Apple Computers would capitalize on Nintendo's colorized system success with their own take on it: the iMac series, which featured colorful cased Macs.

In late '96, with new titles starting to dwindle (because of developers' commitment to the emerging 32 and 64 bit markets) and the Game Boy's popularity beginning to die down, Nintendo introduced the Game Boy pocket line. The pocket version could've symbolized the end of the Game Boy's lifespan. In previous years, Nintendo released smaller versions of their NES and SNES systems at the end of their respective lifecycles. Videogame magazines were quick to point out the Game Boy was out of gas and the fat lady was finally singing. Rumors were circulating that a new Nintendo handheld codenamed "Atlantis" was in development. In the meantime, gamers seeing Game Boy portable as a better choice over the old brick-like design, flocked by the millions to pick up the more portable versions, and almost overnight, the Game Boy was selling like hotcakes again. The following year, Nintendo would capitalize on the public's renewed interest by color casing their portable line and relaunching the Game Boy with a multimillion dollar advertising campaign telling the world that "smaller is better." All the while, rumors of "Atlantis" quietly sank into the virtual ocean like its namesake.

By the late 90's, Nintendo would create a new franchise title that would propel the Game Boy into the next millennium: Pokémon. The Nintendo Pocket Monsters took the U.S. by storm and in late '99, the Pokémon video games would take the Game Boy to new heights. The Pokémon games would inspire a big screen Warner Bros. motion picture blockbuster and the number 1 children's television show on the kids WB television network. Mass merchandising would also capitalize on the Pokémon craze with trading cards, toys, dolls, back packs, umbrellas, and anything else Nintendo's corporate arms could reach and license. This is an important moment for the Game Boy because of all Nintendo's biggest characters, from Mario to Donkey Kong to Link (all of who became famous from an arcade game or NES game), it would be Ash Ketchem & Pikachu who would reach media superstardom. It's ironic that a game originating from a Game Boy title would prove to be Nintendo's biggest marketing vehicle ever. None of the other Nintendo stars has ever reached this level of stardom.

What about the competition? In 1999, the market would be crowded with Sony PlayStations, Nintendo 64s, and Sega Dreamcasts. SNK would enter the portable market with their 16-bit NeoGeo Pocket Color along with 6 color casings for the system (hmm... wonder where they got that idea?). So what's a Game Boy supposed to do to compete against the 3-D graphics, surround sound, and 32-128 bit processor systems? It simply went color.

The best always arrive fashionably late and it took 10 years for the Game Boy to show its colors. With the introduction of color, the Game Boy was assured it would go into the next century as strong, if not stronger, than it was in the 90's. Supported by over 60 million owners worldwide and releasing new titles ranging from Capcom's Resident Evil; to Electronic Arts' Knockout Kings and WCW Mayhem; to Midway's NFL Blitz 2000 and Rampage Universal Tour; to Nintendo's Pokémon Yellow and Star Wars Episode One: Racer; to THQ's Bass Masters 2000, Madden NFL 2000, Rugrats Time Machine, Toy Story 2, and WWF Wrestlemania 2000, the sun will never set on Game Boy.

For videogame romantics, the Game Boy is an extension of the art of b&w videogames. Lovers of the last great arcade b&w games like Asteroids and Tempest can find a kindred spirit in the Game Boy. The Game Boy has hundreds of great games that never feature color and they're fun! The Game Boy was a simple concept, like a Rubik's cube or the Slinky. Nothing extravagant. Nothing glitzy. Just a simple game from a simple time when technology was limited. A lot of gamers will never fully appreciate the amount fun the Game Boy offers because they won't overlook its simplicity.

Remember when mom told you to never "Judge a book by its cover"? That advice also applies to game systems. Regardless, everyone made their judgments. The Game Boy proved them wrong.

Classifieds

WANTED: Gamate and Mega Duck cartridges, Timex/Sinclair cartridges, Voltmace Mark III cartridges, MPT-02/MPT-03 cartridges, Romtec Colorvision cartridges, and other obscure/odd stuff! Russ Perry Jr, 2175 S Tonne Dr. #105, Arlington Hts IL 60005, slapdash@enteract.com

WANTED: Entex Adventure Vision gaming system and/or cartridges. Items be boxed or loose, working or not, any condition wanted. Contact ima-vidiot@stny.rr.com or visit www.adventurevision.com for more details.

WANTED: If you have SMS James "Buster" Douglas for sale or trade, contact me! coleman@wantree.com.au

WANTED: 2600 protos, NTSC Ikari Warriors (trade for PAL version?), LockJaw, Midnight Magic (c)1986, Saving Mary, Shooting Arcade (Atari) 1984 Rev A poster/catalog ANY Atari-related merchandise, Atari Music CD's vols. 1 & 2, Star Raiders Kid's book, manuals, boxes, magazine, etc. Scott Stilphen scottith@ptd.net

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CVG 101

-By Lee K. Seitz-

When is a Combat not a Combat?

Once your classic cartridge collection reaches a certain size, you'll discover you're finding few new cartridges at thrift stores. In order to "get their fix," so to speak, many collectors start collecting label variations to keep their number of "finds" up. "Label variations" simply means different types of labels on the same game. For Colecovision cartridges, this might mean the difference between the labels saying the cart is "for Colecovision" and saying it's "for Colecovision & ADAM." For Intellivision, it's probably the difference between the colorful Mattel labels and the black and white Intellivision, Inc. labels, which also featured slight name changes to avoid licensing fees (e.g. "Football" instead of "NFL Football"). For the Atari 2600, it's more complicated.

Because the 2600 (or VCS) was sold for over a decade, Atari went through four major label styles. The original style was all text on a black background. Then they started replacing much of the text with a colorful picture like the one on the box. Next, Atari went with a silver background. Finally, at the end of the console's life, they used a rust background. (Most collectors call it red; some call it brown. I think "rust" is more accurate than either of those.) But, in all but a handful of cases (see sidebar), the game names never changed. So when is a Combat cartridge not a Combat cartridge? When it's a Sears Tele-Games Tank Plus cartridge.

Atari's "Combat"

Sears Tele-Games' Tank Plus

When the Atari 2600 debuted, Sears was one of the strongest retail chains in the United States. If you wanted to sell your product at Sears, however, it had to have a Sears brand on it. Thus, when Atari signed an agreement with Sears to have them sell the 2600, it became the Sears Tele-Games Video Arcade. (Tele-Games was the "brand name" for video games at Sears. It has no relation, as far as I know, to the current Telegames company - www.telegames.com - which happens to sell video games.)

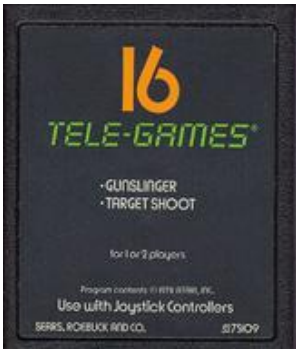
Several of the games received new names as well. It's uncertain exactly why Sears did this. Perhaps it was to confuse shoppers and have them buy what they thought was a new game when it was actually one they already had. To make things more confusing, they named some cartridges after dedicated consoles they had previously released and just added a Roman numeral to the end to differentiate them. The most obvious example is Breakaway IV (a.k.a. Breakout).

Not all games were renamed, of course. Home versions of arcade

games Atari had to secure licenses for weren't (e.g. Space Invaders, Pac-Man), nor were those based on other licensed properties (e.g. Superman). There were also three games that Atari created but only sold through Sears (see sidebar).

Sears Exclusive

It is interesting to note that while Sears similarly renamed Mattel's Intellivision as the Super Video Arcade, they didn't rename any of Mattel's games. The boxes and instructions were different, but the cartridges and overlays are generally indistinguishable from Mattel's normal releases when found loose.



An "Outlaw" in "Gunslinger's" Clothing

As a collector, you might ask whether the Sears version of games and consoles are rarer and therefore more desirable. In general, all Sears releases are slightly rarer than their Atari or Mattel counterparts. Whether they're more desirable, however, depends on the collector you're dealing with. Some collectors who don't care about most cartridge label variations do collect Sears labels. Others don't care at all, except for the "Sears exclusive" games.

If you do decide to start collecting label variations and start examining your duplicate games very closely, you might be amazed at just how many differences you'll find. There are some definite sub-types within the main Atari label variations described earlier. And even within those sub-types, you can find some very minute changes on labels that appear identical at first glance. And that goes for third party companies, too.

Sears Name	Atari Name
Arcade Golf	Miniature Golf
Arcade Pinball	Video Pinball
Baseball	Home Run
Breakaway IV	Breakout
Cannon Man	Human Cannonball
Capture	Flag Capture
Chase	Surround
Checkers	Video Checkers
Circus	Circus Atari
Code Breaker	Codebreaker
Dare Diver	Sky Diver
Dodger Cars	Dodge 'Em
Gunslinger	Outlaw
Math	Fun With Numbers
Maze	Slot Racers
Maze Mania	Maze Craze
Memory Match	Hunt & Score
Outer Space	Star Ship
Poker Plus	Casino
Pong Sports	Video Olympics
Race	Indy 500
Slots	Slot Machine
Soccer	Championship Soccer or Pele's Soccer
Space Combat	Space War
Speedway II	Street Racer
Spelling	Hangman
Steeplechase	(Sears exclusive)
Stellar Track	(Sears exclusive)
Submarine Commander	(Sears exclusive)
Tank Plus	Combat
Target Fun	Air-Sea Battle

Atari Name	a.k.a.
Atari Video Cube	Rubik's Cube
Basic Math	Fun with Numbers
Championship Soccer	Pele's Soccer
(A Game of) Concentration	Hunt & Score
Fun with Numbers	Basic Math
Hunt & Score	(A Game of) Concentration
Pele's Soccer	Championship Soccer
Rubik's Cube	Atari Video Cube

Atari "Silver" Label vs. Atari "Rust" Label

John Earney began compiling a list of 2600 label variations, which can be found on his home page at http://www2.best.com/~jearney/. It hasn't been updated in a few years, however. I guess even John got overwhelmed by all the small changes one can find. So, if you decide to collect label variations, set a limit on what you'll keep. Otherwise you'll probably quickly find your collection (rather than your extras) overflowing with Missile Commands, Space Invaders, and maybe even Combat, regardless of the name on the label.

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Classic Gaming On The world wide web

GameArchive

GameArchive is a site run by volunteers from the classic gaming community. Its primary focus is providing information on arcade and pinball machines. Various sections include FAQ's, schematics, screenshots, and contributors homepages. The highlight of the GameArchive is the Flyers section, which allows you to view promotional flyers for the classic machines.

http://www.gamearchive.com

Funescape.com

Got a craving to play some classic games while online at work? Head over to Funescape.com and check out their Java based classic arcade games. When your boss isn't looking, try your hand at Pleiades, Tempest, Asteroids, and others. Funescape.com will also host your classic gaming related website for free.

http://www.funescape.com

The Commodore Dungeon

Before getting his hands on Atari, Jack Tramiel ran a company called Commodore Business Machines. The crown jewel of CBM was their Commodore 64. Packed with 64k of RAM and 20k of ROM, this powerhouse (at the time!) could be found in many a junior hackers homes. Burt Bochenek has built an Internet shrine, The Commodore Dungeon, to pay homage to this computer from the 8-bit era. You'll find articles, specs, links, and even C64 emulators and games, in case you get the itch to play an old favorite.

http://come.to/Commodore

Classic Game Creations

Classic Game Creations is the Internet's headquarters for breathing new life into your old consoles. John Dondzilla has created brand spanking new games for the Vec-

Purple Dinosaur Massacre

trex, ColecoVision, and Odyssey 2. He's even produced the first 64k game for the Vectrex entitled "Vecmania."

Definitely don't leave the site until you check out the demo of "Purple Dinosaur Massacre" for the ColecoVision. John created "Purple Dinosaur" to gain programming experience for the Coleco. In doing so, he created a fun little game where you get to blow away a certain annoying dinosaur.

However, our favorite portion of the site is information regarding "Joysticks" the movie. Wonderful still shots capture the essence of this great flick we reviewed last issue.

www.classicgamecreations.com

Back in Time

Mike Stulir's "Back in Time" website is a huge resource for classic gaming goodies. Back in Time features concise classic gaming reviews, emulators, and the latest news. But what makes his website stand out are the unique web radio broadcasts. These broadcasts feature interviews with the people who are making waves in classic gaming news. So, grab your RealPlayer and have a listen.

www.emuclassics.com/backintime

The Mushroom Kingdom

Celebrate all that is Mario! The Mushroom Kingdom, which recently turned three, is everything you need to know about our favorite jumping plumber.

The site features fan art, original articles, screenshots, icons, history, reference and a whole lot more. The Mushroom Kingdom is exceptionally easy to navigate, constantly updated and incredibly fun to read!

www.classicgaming.com/tmk/

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Got A Site??

Want your website to be considered for a listing in this column?

Just send us your particulars. . . website URL, contact name, and a valid e-mail address to **cav@classicgamer.com**

Reader Poll

Classic Gamer Magazine wants to be the best darned publication about classic gaming you can get your hands on. By letting us know what game systems you would like us to focus on and any other aspects of classic gaming you would like to see, we will be able to provide you with a more entertaining magazine. This will also let us know your all time favorite games, handhelds, systems, computer, and arcade games. All responses are guaranteed confidential.

Please return this entire poll sheet (photocopies accepted) to: Classic Gamer Magazine, 7770 Regents Road #113-293, San Diego, CA 92122, fax to (781) 846-0373, or e-mail your answers to: cav@classicgamer.com

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AGES: ___Under 2 ___3-5

___6-11 ___12-17

EDUCATION LEVEL:

___Some High School ___College Grad

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Check off all gaming systems or equipment you own or plan to buy within the next 12 months

	Own	Plan to Buy		Own	Plan to Buy
Atari VCS/2600	___	___	Nintendo Gameboy	___	___
Arcadia/Starpath Supercharger	___	___	SuperNintendo	___	___
Intellivision	___	___	Nintendo 64	___	___
ColecoVision	___	___	Sony Playstation	___	___
Odyssey 2	___	___	Sega Master System	___	___
Atari 5200	___	___	Sega Genesis	___	___
Atari 7800	___	___	Sega Saturn	___	___
Atari Jaguar	___	___	Sega 32X	___	___
Atari Lynx	___	___	Atari 400/800	___	___
Nintendo 8 Bit (NES)	___	___	Apple II	___	___
IBM PC Compatible	___	___	Macintosh	___	___
Sega Dreamcast	___	___			

Other game systems, equipment, computers: _____

How Much Money Do You Spend Per Week on Video Games?

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How many people (besides you) will read this issue of Classic Gamer Magazine: _____

Your Top Three Favorite Videogame Cartridges Are: (Game and System)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Your Top Three Favorite Computer Games Are: (Game and System)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Your Top Three Favorite Arcade Coin-Ops Are: (Game)

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2. _____
3. _____

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DEEP THAW

"Super" Men

By Chris Lion

I've never been a big fan of Superman. Call me crazy, but he has just never done anything for me. My roommate in college thought Superman was "*The Best."* Superman was never "bitchen," "rad," or any other cool way of saying he liked him. My roommate, Phil, always called him *"The Best."* Personally, I always worried he was a bit of a wuss for liking a comic book hero. But, I've had a fondness for all things goofy (including Phil), so I guess he could certainly like an odd comic hero.

Phil couldn't get enough of the show and especially George Reeves. I enjoyed the Christopher Reeve movie, but Phil had "strong issues" over the portrayal of Lois Lane, of which I will spare you. Suffice to say, many a party ended abruptly with Phil uttering, "So, who's your favorite super-hero?" You either agreed with him that Superman was "*The Best,"* argued in vain for hours for your choice, or ran out of the room screaming as he asked the question. Most people went with option three.

My first introduction to "The Man of Steel" was watching the TV show as a kid. It always seemed to be the same episode over and over: Jimmy and Lois got taken by 'the bad guys,' and Superman flew in at the last second and saved them. Just after Superman left, Clark Kent would saunter in and everyone would think of him as a wimp for not getting there in time to help out. Maybe Clark didn't want to save you, Jimmy—ever think about that?

What bothered me most, besides Phil's odd idolization of "the son of Jor-El," was the fact that whenever someone shot at Superman, he'd stand there, hands on hips and grin. But when they ran out of ammunition, they would throw their gun at him and he would duck. Bullets don't scare him, but throwing a gun like a girl at him causes him to duck out of the way? I was repeatedly asked to leave my dorm room shortly after each viewing, because of my "disrespect" of the stranger from another planet.

My favorite way to give Phil grief was to say, "I don't get what the big deal about his being solar-powered is." To which he would spend the next three hours desperately trying to get me to understand that Krypton had an orange sun, and it was "our glorious yellow sun" that gave him his power.

"But what if it weren't yellow? What about… say, golden?" And he would start back at the beginning. He practically had buttons on his forehead that read, "Push here for endless babbling."

The only thing we agreed on was that Superman the video game was "*The Best*." He got his Atari for high school graduation and we played endlessly; constantly challenging ourselves to obtain the undisputed quickest time (and avoiding classes like Superman would Kryptonite). Whenever I beat him, I'd just lean back and smile, "You are *such* a Jimmy Olsen!" Generally, that would throw him enough so that I could beat him like a drum the rest of the night. The second button on his forehead was the "Instant Jimmy Olsen" button.

Time has gone on, Phil currently is a reporter for The New York Times (as close to working for The Daily Planet as one can get), and his Atari was lost to an angry girlfriend that had a thing for some "Caped Crusader." When I informed him of my Atari 2600, he asked if I had the Superman cartridge. When I told him yes, he quickly scheduled a flight out so we could decide once and for all who was absolutely *The Best*.

So, it was with great excitement that we sat down with my recently discovered cartridge of Superman and wondered, will he heroically dodge Kryptonite, but dive under a table if someone throws a sofa cushion at him? Would the game be *The Best* or tragically *Clark Kentian*?

It took us 25 minutes to figure out how to get the thing plugged in. I hadn't played in a couple of months, and I ask you, who really understands where all those little cables go? Finally, after sticking anything that looked like a cable into anything that resembled a receptacle, we got the game going.

As the game came to life, Phil muttered, "Who's that?"

"That would be Superman."
"Really? Why won't he fly?"
"Because you're such a Jimmy Olsen"

We finally figured out how to get Superman to fly and quickly realized we had forgotten everything we thought we knew about this game. Apparently, he had become Jimmy Olsen and I, a loopy Perry White.

The bad guys (blobs with black things sticking out - I think they were supposed to be guns) seemed to hover near the corner opposite Superman. Every time either of us entered a new scene, the bad guys quickly zipped out. Phil played for 30 minutes without ever capturing a bad guy.

"This sucks!" Phil (Jimmy) whined.

"No, I think it's just you."

"Like you're doing any better…"

"I'm beating you…" I said smugly.

"By six minutes, big deal."

"Um, at least my score is a positive number…"

It went on like that for hours. We never could figure out what was going on. Phil seemed to make sure that Superman flew directly into Kryptonite every time it appeared, and I kept picking up the spazzy Lois Lane—or as I preferred to call her, "Margot Kidder on a good day."

As dawn approached and we'd yet to complete a single round of the game, we admitted defeat. Phil, who I was now openly calling "Jimmy," was distraught we could not recapture our wasted youth. I was wondering if my friend was truly becoming the wuss I always feared he was deep down inside.

We turned on the TV to see if perhaps we could find The Man of Steel and maybe some of our lost machismo. When The Powerpuff Girls came on, my question was answered.

"Cool!" Said Phil, "They're *The Best*."

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